Oscar and the Talking Totems by J. NORMA

fantastic ADVENTURES

PRIL
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DWELLERS OF THE DEEP

by DON WILCOX

OBERT BLOCH ★ WILLIAM P. McGIVERN ★ ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

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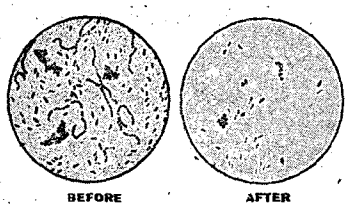
NOTE HOW LISTERINE GARGLE REDUCED GERMS



BEFORE AFTER

The two drawings illustrate height of range in germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces in test cases before and after gargling Listerine Antiseptic. Fifteen minutes after gargling, germ reductions up to 96.7% were noted; and even one hour after, germs were still reduced as much as 80%.

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Tests showed that Listerine Antiseptic reduced surface germs as much as 96.7% even 15 minutes after the gargle; up to 80% one hour later.

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Fantastic ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOL. 4
NO. 4

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Cover painting by Malcolm Smith illustrating a scene from "Dwellers of the Deep." Illustrations by Malcolm Smith; Virgil Finlay; Julian S. Krupa; Rod Ruth; Ned Hadley; Jay Jackson; Joe Sewell

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FANTASTIC ADVENTURES APRIL, 1942

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VOLUME 4, NUMBER 4

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DO THE DEAD RETURN?

A strange man in Los Angeles, known as "The Voice of Two Worlds," tells of astonishing experiences in far-off and mysterious Tibet, often called the land of miracles by the few travelers permitted to visit it. Here he lived among the lamas, mystic priests of the temple. "In your previous lifetime," a very old lama told him, "you lived here, a lama in this temple. You and I were boys together. I lived on, but you died in youth, and were reborn in England. I have been expecting your return."

The young Englishman was amazed as he looked around the temple where he was believed to have lived and died. It seemed uncannily familiar, he appeared to know every nook and corner of it, yet—at least in this lifetime—he had never been there before. And mysterious was the set of circumstances that had brought him. Could it be a case of reincarnation, that strange belief of the East that souls return to earth again and again, living many lifetimes?

Because of their belief that he had formerly been a lama in the temple, the lamas welcomed the young man with open arms and taught him rare mysteries and long-hidden practices, closely guarded for three thousand years by the sages, which have enabled many to perform amazing feats. He says that the system often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, can be used to achieve brilliant business and professional success as well as great happiness. The young man himself later became a noted explorer and geographer, a successful publisher of maps and atlases of the Far East, used throughout the world.

"There is in all men a sleeping giant of mindpower," he says. "When awakened, it can make man capable of surprising feats, from the prolonging of youth to success in many other worthy endeavors." The system is said by many to promote improvement in health; others tell of increased bodily strength, courage and poise.

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The Editor's Notebook

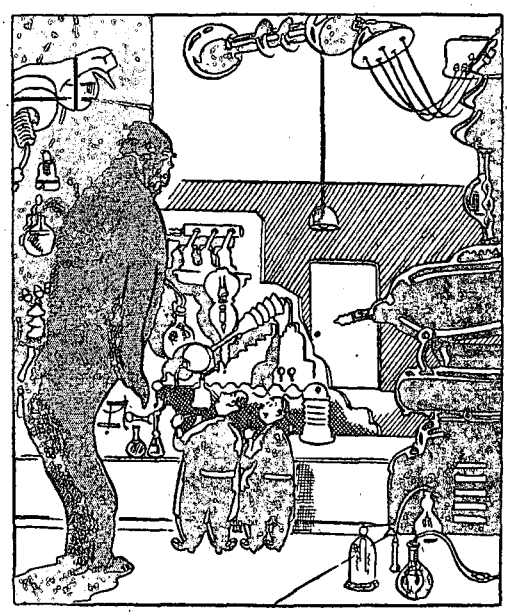
A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ALONG about the end of this department you will find a steam calliope and twelve gigantic royal blue Malayan elephants, bearing enormous teak logs, ornately carved, and blessed by the high priest of the all high stuff. The purpose of all this enormous pomp and activity is to build a royal throne upon which will sit a lovely Mac Girl, and in her lap will repose this copy of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, as our personal gift to you!

Here you are, readers! A giant-size FANTASTIC ADVENTURES; 244 pages of your favorite magazine. A complete surprise, to be sure, to us as well as to you. But the other day we happened to see a copy of our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories,* and we got jealous. Why not make FANTASTIC the same size, said we? Why shouldn't our readers get a special issue too? They are just as fine people as the readers of *Amazing*—and how! and so . . .

Well there you are. If you can find anything better in the fantasy field, please tell Ripley. He'll be interested—and we won't believe it.

PRESENTING this big special issue isn't all we've done. We've got the swellest treats between two covers you've ever seen. We'll just point out a few to begin with.



"I knew him when he was nothing but a germ in a test tube"

Number one—the cover: Malcolm Smith presents his first work in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, a cover painting which served as the inspiration for one of the finest stories Don Wilcox has done in recent months. This new artist scored a hit in *Amazing Stories* for January, with "The Test Tube Girl" and now he takes over this magazine. And he'll be back. We have four magnificent covers on hand by this artist, and each one has served to inspire one of your favorite authors to write a pretty fine yarn.

NUMBER two — "Dwellers Of The Deep": Some times we wonder how anybody can come out of a stuffy little country school, and reveal such a startling imagination, and such a deft dramatic touch. We are only happy that Don Wilcox turned his envied talents to pulp fiction, and especially to us. Here we have a story that is as different an undersea tale as has ever been written. And we think you'll agree with us wholeheartedly.

HERE we should say number three, but that paragraph opening is getting a bit deadly. So we'll be trite and just say: next!

But if you think it's trite to tell you that Manly Wade Wellman, who is now serving his Uncle Sammy, is in this issue with another of his very popular Hok the Caveman stories, you're distinctly on the damp side. Originally we ran this series in *Amazing Stories*. That was before FANTASTIC ADVENTURES came into its own. Many readers pointed out that this character was more suited to this magazine. So, by popular request, we switched. And when you read "Hok Visits The Land Of Legends" you will be reading the best of a series that has rivaled even the famous Adam Link. (P.S. Adam Link is in the current *Amazing Stories,* which ought to be tip enough!)

INTRODUCING another author: Harold Lawlor. Harold is somewhat of a protege of Don Wilcox. He's tried us before, but he's finally sold us. And we're quite anxious to know what you think of him. It seems Don has gone back to teaching, and personally, we think he's done a right fine job. So, here's another author's "first" in our pages. We don't think it will be the last. The title is "The Eternal Priestess".

(Continued on page 68)

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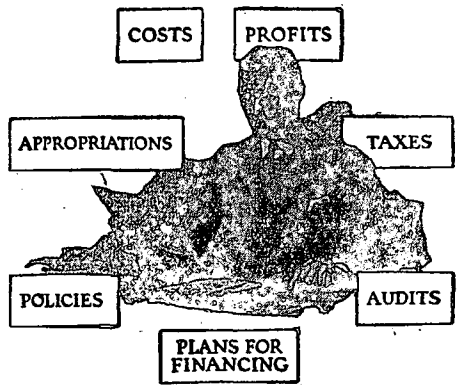

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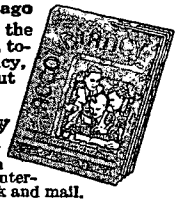

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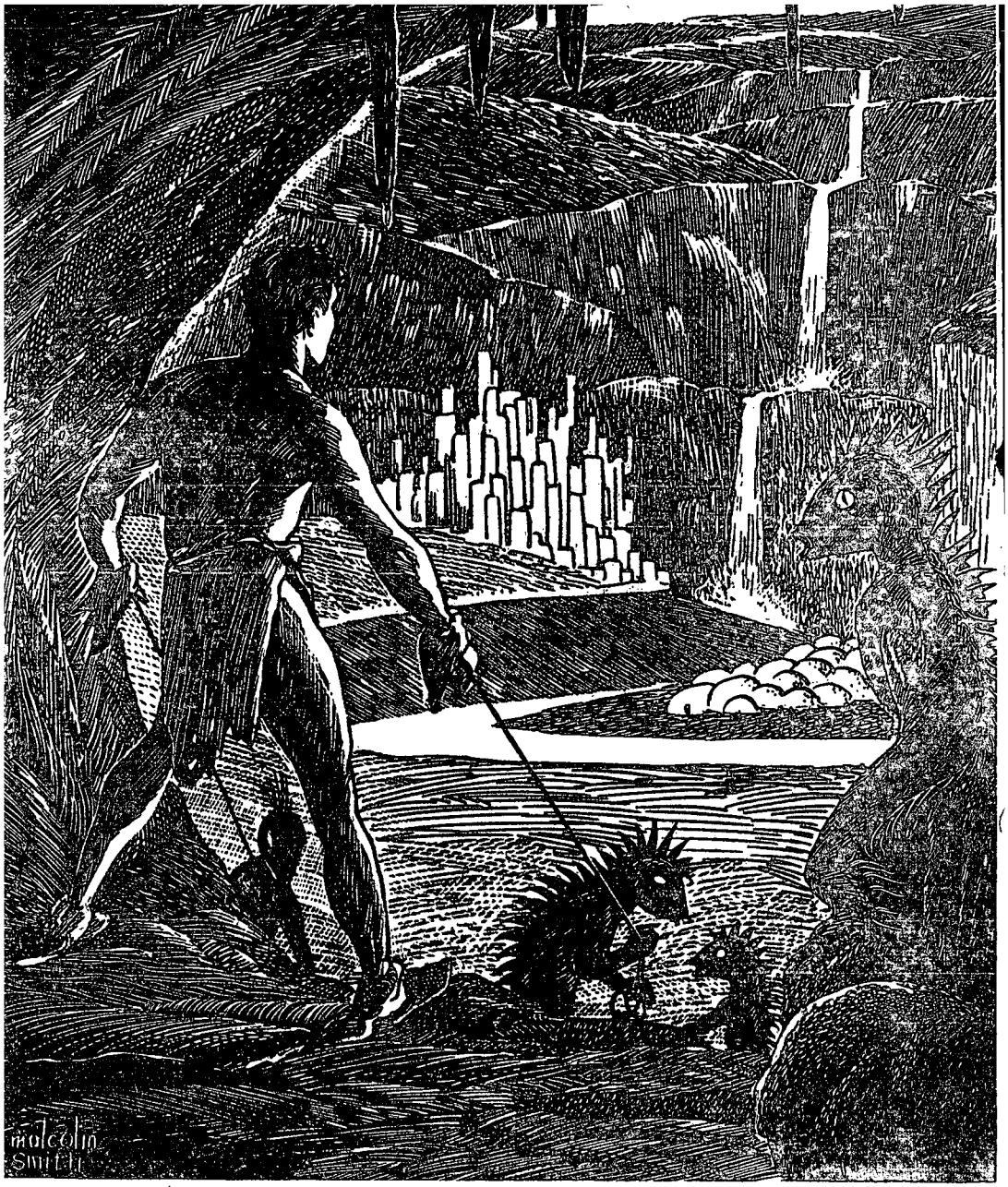

The fish people dragged him forward; a weird valley appeared before him

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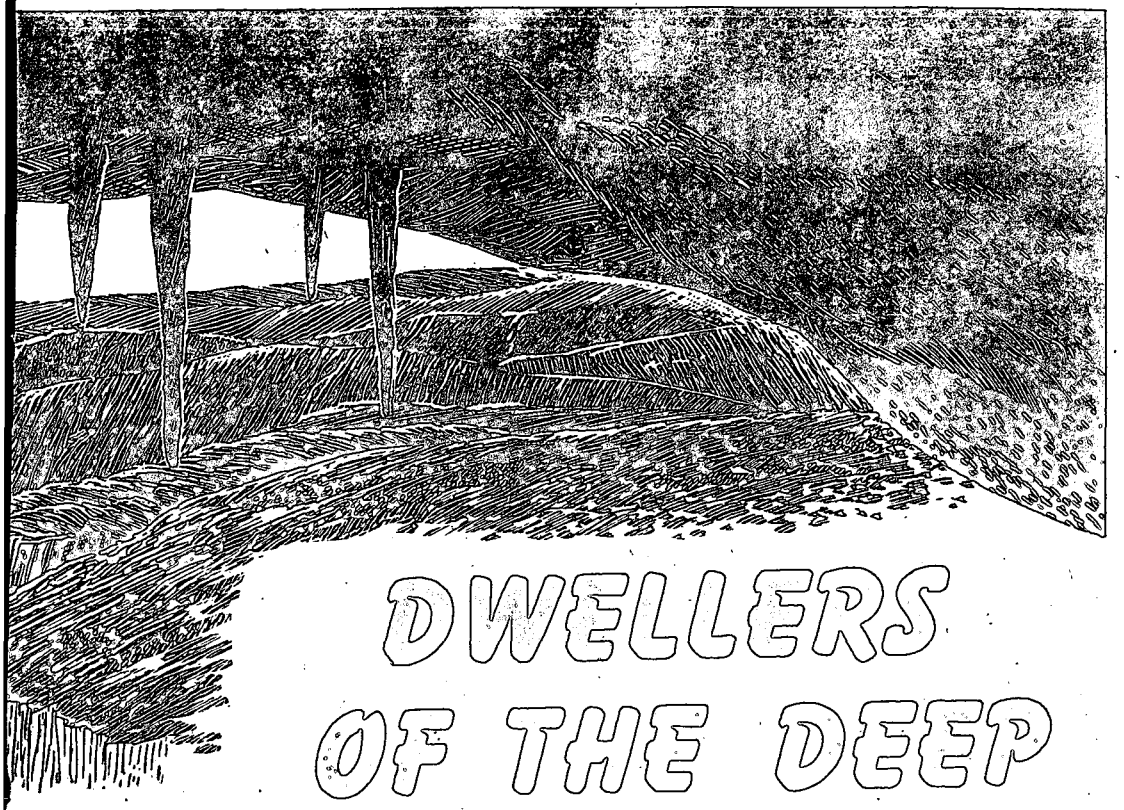

DWELLERS OF THE DEEP

by DON WILCOX

Pierce went into the deep to find Bea Riley, kidnaped and drowned by a weird fish race

BILL PIERCE was hurrying up to the deck to keep a date when the alarm sounded.

"Girl overboard! Girl overboard!"

The whistles blew, the big liner churned waters, and began to circle. It would take several minutes for it to stop. Meanwhile everybody scampered to the rail to look for the girl who had gone over.

"It's your gal friend, Pierce," some fellow-passenger yelled.

Bill Pierce tore off his coat, kicked off his shoes, leaped to rail.

The girl was a full hundred and fifty yards away. Her arms were fighting the water frantically. Strange behavior for Beatrice Riley, swimming champion.

Bill dived. In a moment he was skimming through the waves with a powerful stroke.

"Hold on, Bea!"

His cry was probably lost in the clamor. Ringing in his ears were the cynical words of some passenger. "Publicity stunt!"

Bill Pierce didn't believe it. The diving team of Pierce and Riley didn't need publicity, and Bea Riley wasn't one to pull a cheap hoax.

Bill caught sight of her. He was less than fifty feet away. He saw her eyes widened as if in pain. Her arms jerked upward helplessly, she sank down.

With all his championship speed Bill

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Pierce was too late. Or was he?

"That's the spot!" someone yelled at him from an approaching boat.

He surface dived, combed the waters as far as his keen eyesight would reach.

Moments later he came up. But there was no sign of Beatrice Riley.

Sailors dived from the life boat, now, and Bill Pierce, catching half a breath, went down for another search.

He spiralled downward, so deep now that green tropical waters grew black against his wide-open eyes. The hammering pressure of the water pounded at his brain. He was baffled by the strangeness of this occurrence.

Now and again he would catch sight of some vague form sliding past, deep beneath him, only to dart away at his approach.

He bounded to the surface gasping for breath.

"Muff said he saw her," one of the sailors yelled. "He said some *fish* had her. They were pullin' her—"

"That sounds like Muff," another sailor growled. "He'd lie to you if your life depended—"

"Which way did he see her?" Pierce snapped.

Someone pointed, and Bill Pierce shot down again.

But when he was forced up he had failed once more.

"Who was it saw her?" he demanded.

"Just some o' Windy Muff's talk," said a sailor deprecatingly.

"But I did!" a red-headed sailor declared hotly. "I saw a bunch o' fish clap a glass barrel over her—"

The sailors roared him down. This was no time for any of his wild lies.

"But I *saw* it!" Windy Muff blazed. "Just like I said, the fish had a barrel —"

Pop! Someone slapped him across the mouth, muttering, "Can't you see this fellow's cut up over her? Save your damn' jokin' for another time."

"But I'm not jokin'—"

THEY cut him off, and one of the sailors explained to Bill Pierce that anything the red-haired Windy Muff said seriously could be taken as a lie right out of thin air.

A whistle from the liner called them back. No more time could be spared on a lost cause. Thirty minutes had been lost.

Pierce tried to plunge again, but the sailors grabbed him, hauled him into the lifeboat. . . .

Back in his stateroom again, as the liner's engines rumbled into full speed ahead, Bill Pierce went through the routine of changing into dry clothes. He moved numbly. The sudden inexplicable tragedy had dulled his senses.

A knock sounded at his door. It was a steward.

"The captain wishes to see you in his office, sir."

"The captain?"

"Can you make it right away, sir?"

"Yes. But first—get a wireless off for me." Bill scribbled a brief message, addressed it to George Vinson in Honolulu. "My friend Vin will find this hard to believe. I can hardly realize it myself."

A moment later Bill Pierce entered the office, dropped into the chair across from the captain's desk, agreed to answer a few questions to the best of his ability.

"I've learned that the girl was *pulled* overboard," said the captain. "Do you have any explanation?"

"Pulled?" Pierce tried to shake the dizziness from his brain. The heavy weight of grief was on him.

"They tell me that a rope—or something resembling a rope—was looped around her arms and waist, and the other end led down to the water."

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Bill Pierce gave a bitter snort. "That red-haired sailor is a swift liar, isn't he? Out in the lifeboat he was seeing fish run away with her in a transparent tub."

"Anything that Windy Muff says can be taken with barrels of salt," said the captain. "We've heard too many of his stories. But this rope—well, three passengers saw it."

"Oh, they must be mistaken," Pierce clipped his words with temper. "If they're trying to cook up a suicide—"

"Not so fast, Mr. Pierce," the captain cut in with a heavy scowl. "Nobody's trying to cook up anything. We're after the facts. What kind of rope do you think Miss Riley might have used?"

Pierce narrowed his eyes. "Begging your pardon, but I think you're off your nut."

The captain's scowl tightened.

"Maybe I am, Pierce, but I can't ignore the evidence. Three passengers substantially agreed on their stories. Miss Riley was standing at the rail, they said, when they suddenly noticed a cord stretching up from the surface of the water. They saw the loop jerk tight around her shoulders and pull her over the rail into the ocean."

"IT DOESN'T make sense," Pierce paced the floor, snapping his fingers.

"By the time the alarm sounded her arms had evidently fought free of the rope—"

"That proves it was no suicide."

"But the cord evidently caught her feet and the weight pulled her to the bottom."

. ."*What* weight?" Pierce was angry. "Did anyone *see* a weight? . . . Did anyone see her pull the loop around her arms? . . . Well, what's the answer?"

"We're obscure on those points, Pierce. I've got my men searching for anything that might have been used for a drop-weight."

"Drop-weight, hell. How, in broad daylight, could Beatrice Riley or anyone else drop some object into the ocean without anyone seeing it fall?"

The captain had no ready answer. But he faced Pierce with an accusing look. His suspicions were running rampant.

"Answer me carefully, Pierce," he said. "Did you and Beatrice Riley quarrel last night?"

"Well, I'll be dam—your honor, what's the sense of that question?"

"Calm down, Pierce," said the captain. "What you say is being recorded by my secretary in the next room. I won't pry into your personal affairs any deeper than necessary. But if—as a few passengers have testified, you and Beatrice Riley were arguing—"

"It was nothing serious—just a discussion—"

"You'll be doing yourself a service," said the captain, "if you'll relate to me what you can recall of that discussion. That's the simplest way to clear yourself of any suspicion of murder."

For a moment Bill Pierce was white with rage, tensing his muscles to hold himself in check.

Then he saw his reflection in a panel mirror, and the fury in his cold eyes rebuked him. An outburst of temper was no way to ward off the captain's suspicions.

Pierce drew a deep breath, sat down, after a moment managed to speak calmly.

"Okay, captain. I'll tell you what we talked about. I might as well. I'd be thinking about it anyhow, now that she's gone . . . Last night when I met her on the deck I told her I'd just received a radiogram . . ."

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CHAPTER II

THAT previous evening when Bill Pierce had received a radiogram he had hurried around the deck to find Beatrice.

She wasn't going to like this, he was sure. The telegram was from his friend George Vinson. Beatrice had no use for Vinson. She held an unaccountable dislike for him.

"Just my luck," Bill Pierce had said to himself.

Bill was madly in love with Beatrice Her mysterious nature always held him at a distance. But he was determined to slip a ring on her finger before they reached Honolulu.

Now with the Hawiian Islands less than two days off, this had to happen.

George Vinson had radiographed from Hawaii. He would be there to meet them. Morover, he wanted to take them on to South America on his yacht.

Bill Pierce knew Bea would never hear to it.

Now Bill came upon Beatrice lounging in a deck chair. She was dressed in her sporty blue and white, looking as beautiful as Bill Pierce had ever seen her—and that was saying a lot.

"A surprise radiogram for us, Bea."

"Not from George Vinson?" she asked apprehensively.

"Good old Vin," Bill smiled. "Are you in the mood? There, there, don't frown so. It spoils your pretty face."

He handed her the radiogram, watched her expression as she read it.

The mystery in Beatrice Riley's face was ever present. It was something Bill would dream about at night and read about in the Sunday sports reviews. It was something that everyone remarked about.

Beatrice Riley was a mystery. She was one of those rare persons who never talk about themselves. She had blossomed into a celebrity after a brief round of bathing beauty contests. The reporters, inquiring where she came from, discovered that no one knew—and the girl positively refused to talk about her past.

Before Bill met her he was skeptical of the stories of her sensational diving. Some smart promoter must be hoaxing the public, he thought. A *man* might risk his life in a few of those daredevil dives—himself, for example. But he was tops, or darned near it. But no woman would dare—

Then came the momentous sports show that he and Bea Riley were asked to appear in together. And that changed everything. Bill Pierce saw for himself.

Yes, and he came so near to being outclassed that it wasn't funny. Bea Riley could have walked off with the show. But she didn't. She shared honors with him.

That was the beginning of the team of Pierce and Riley, headed straight for international fame. For Bea was everything the reporters had claimed and more.

From the west coast they had flown the Pacific to appear in expositions in the Philippines and Australia. Now they were sailing back to the States. New York was already building them up for a summer season appearance, only three months away. . . .

BEATRICE reread the radiogram three or four times, then passed it back to Bill without a word. She looked out over the waters pensively.

"You see, Bea," Bill said in the hearty manner of a salesman with a bill of goods to sell, "good old Vinson has worked up some engagements for us down in South America. You know Vin—always looking out for us. He's

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got business contacts down there, and they're pulling for us—"

"Bill, you're not considering going?"

"Well, it must be a good thing or he wouldn't suggest it. He's going to meet us at Honolulu and take us on to Argentina in his big sea-going yacht."

Bill saw the disapproval cloud Beatrice's face.

"Did you tell him we'd do it?" she asked.

"Certainly not. I always talk these things over with you."

"And then you do what George Vinson wants you to."

Bill's hot temper wasn't good for moments like these, and knew it. He saw red whenever his path was crossed. And counting to ten didn't help.

"Just remember something," he snapped. "Wait for me."

He struck off around the deck. He had to work off steam somehow. Maybe by the time he came back Bea would be reasonable.

But no, she was never reasonable when George Vinson was concerned. Bill couldn't understand it. She was such a swell, fair person to work with in every other way.

Only six months ago Bill had introduced Bea Riley to Vinson. And what a feud he'd started! All the fine things he'd ever said for his old friend had been wasted. Bea Riley had shunned George Vinson like poison.

Vinson had simply thrust his white-gloved fingers through his mane of fine black hair and walked away, ignoring the insulting treatment.

"What in thunder went wrong between those two?" Bill had asked himself after that meeting of six months ago. Then he had tried to apologize to Vinson. Bea Riley, he said, musn't be misjudged for her seeming coolness. She was a mystery to everyone.

Bill had also apologized to Bea for his old friends manners. The important little man couldn't help his extreme dignity. His wealth, together with his penchant for profound thought, gave him an air of exaggerated importance.

As for Vinson's strange habit of always wearing white gloves, *indoors as well as out*—well, he must possess scarred and unsightly hands. That was what Bill concluded. And after knowing him for six years Bill took the white gloves to be as much a part of Vin as his face or his pompadour of fine black hair. . . .

Bill returned to Beatrice and she looked up at him with a quick smile.

"What about it, Bea?" he said.

"Whatever you want to do, we'll do," said Beatrice.

"Gee, honey," he caught her in his arms, kissed her. "You know me. What I want is a honeymoon. In Canada, if you say so."

He looked at her steadily. Her eyelids lowered.

"Are you taking me to South America, Bill?" she asked.

"No. I'll wire George Vinson it's off. From this minute on we're independent. How's that?"

Beatrice searched his eyes. "I hope you mean it, Bill."

"I'll send him a radiogram yet tonight."

"Think it over till morning," said Beatrice. "I want to be sure you don't change your mind . . . Let me know at lunch . . ."

CHAPTER III

NOW, near mid-afternoon of the day that was to have brought Bill Pierce and Beatrice Riley to a moment of decision, the diving champion sat before the desk of the captain, reciting

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his story of the previous evening.

"That's about all," Bill said in a low voice. He touched his handkerchief to the corners of his eyes.

"Thank you, Pierce," said the captain.

"If that's all, I'll go," said Bill. "I want to talk with Windy Muff."

The captain sat silently, frowning.

"Pierce," he said, "that girl was the most remarkable swimmer and diver I ever saw. I watched the slow motion movie of her novel waterfall dive from two hundred feet. I saw her start at the top, dive down fifty feet to the first elevated pool, shoot over the edge with the cascade and down another fifty to the second pool, and so on. Four successive dives in one—all in the midst of that roaring artificial waterfall. When I think of that, Pierce, and the long underwater swim she did—"

Bill Pierce slapped his hand on the table. "You're seeing it my way now, Captain. There's a chance she's not drowned. She could fight water for hours. How far off were those volcanic islands when she went over?"

"About eight miles."

"Let me go back, Captain. Give me your launch. And a compass—"

"Could you keep on a course?"

"Let me take a sailor along. Windy Muff. I'll start at once."

"You're taking a big risk. How'll you get back?"

"I've got a friend in Honolulu—George Vinson. He's got a big yacht—"

"Better send him a radiogram at once," said the captain. "If he puts to sea this afternoon he should overtake you by morning. I'll round up Windy Muff for you and check the log." . . .

THERE was not a minute to lose. Miles of waters were piling up for the back-track cruise.

Bill shot his radiogram off to Vinson. Meanwhile a note came to him from the captain stating that Windy Muff was seen entering Stateroom Number 90, occupied by one Jean Maribeau.

Bill dashed down the corridor, knocked at number 90. He was admitted by a sturdy immaculate little man with a bristling black mustache and a square jaw.

"Pardon me," said Bill. "Is there a sailor here by the name of—"

"Ah, it is the famous Mr. Pierce. We are honored." Jean Maribeau might have been greeting a long lost brother. "Have a chair, Mr. Pierce. Mr. Muff and I have something interesting—"

"I want a quick word with Windy Muff," Bill said bluntly. "I'm starting back in a launch to try to find the girl that fell overboard."

The red-haired sailor looked up from the desk where he had been preoccupied with some pencil sketches. "Not a half bad idea."

"Has Mr. Pierce heard of your remarkable observation, Mr. Muff?" Maribeau asked.

"Uh-huh," said Muff shrugging. "I didn't reckon he was interested."

Bill Pierce was momentarily distracted by walls full of pictures. They reminded him of the physiology charts in a doctor's office; diagrams of circulatory systems, exposed muscles, skeletons. But the subjects were animals rather than men. Odd, nameless animals, as far as Bill could guess. Obviously this Frenchman was a zoologist and a man of learning.

"Mr. Muff has told me," Maribeau volunteered, touching the points of his black mustache, "that he saw some strange fish capture Miss Riley in a sort of glass tub."

"I've got no time to listen," said Bill. "I'm on my way back. Muff, do you want to come?"

Windy Muff turned to Maribeau.

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"How about it, Doc?"

"I would give ten years of my life," said the scientist, "to possess one single specimen of those unique sea creatures. Could I go too, Mr. Pierce?"

CHAPTER IV

A FEW minutes later the three men got into the twin-motored launch and were lowered into the open sea.

While the liner plowed on toward Hawaii, they roared away on the endless back-track course into the southwestern sun.

Windy Muff held the craft on a dead line.

"Now, Maribeau," said Bill, "what were you saying about Windy's fish story?"

The scientist opened his packet of books and papers.

"Would you like to see a sketch of their footprints, Mr. Pierce?"

"I beg your pardon?" said Bill.

"Would you like to see the footprints of the fish that got her?" Maribeau repeated. "I've made a drawing from the marks that Mr. Muff and I discovered on the side of the ship."

"Footprints *of a fish?*" Bill stammered.

"Fish isn't the proper term, of course," said Maribeau. "Amphibian would be more appropriate—or anuran—though I must confess this creature is difficult to classify, especially upon the meager evidence of a few footprints."

Bill bent over the pencil sketch.

"Maribeau and I spotted it right beneath the rail where she went over," said Windy. "My gollies, if this ain't one for Ripley."

Bill gaped at the bold outline of a webbed foot.

"Name it and you can have it, Pierce," said Windy Muff.

"I'd call it a mud splatter," Bill grunted, "though it might be taken for the footprint of an oversized duck—or better, a frog—"

"Now you're getting warm," said Maribeau, cocking his head. "As near as I can place it, it's a huge Surinam toad, a species of water and mud creatures found only in Dutch Guiana. They're quite rare, and strange to say they have no tongues. But this fellow is no regular. He's too large. And too far from Guiana. And too much at home in deep water."

The sketch of the foot, Bill noted, fairly filled the sheet of typing paper.

"He climbed the side of the ship," said Windy Muff with the air of having witnessed it.

"With a rope, apparently," the scientist amended. "We found the mark of a wet seaweed rope and a small hook that he had used to pull himself up to the deck where Miss Riley stood."

"It don't make sense, but Maribeau claims he musta crawled up and lassoed her, the slimy devil," said Windy Muff.

"That's our strange verdict," said Maribeau confidently. "And that argues we're on the trail of some monstrosity *with intelligence*. I never saw anything like it."

Bill Pierce was frowning, trying to digest these bizarre evidences.

"Maribeau," he said sharply. "What do you make of all this? Do you think such creatures could actually imprison a person with ropes and—and *tubs?*"

"I've no right to theorize on the basis of these footprints," said Maribeau, "but I'll go as far as anyone to find out. . . ."

DAWN found Bill and his two companions nearing the area of the volcanic islands. A clear night and a glass-smooth ocean had facilitated their backtracking excursion.

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Now Windy Muff stood in the prow sighting the low mountaintops. He passed his field glasses to his companions.

"When those two peaks line up with us," he said, "we'll be right on a dead shot for the spot where she went over. Then it'll be a matter of farther or closer, the devil knows which."

"We'll have to pull closer," said Bill. "I remember seeing a bit of cliff along the water-line."

"And a heavy black line on the water —at low tide," Windy Muff added. "Ain't I right, Maribeau?"

The French scientist was lost in his books. With the first gray of the morning he had resumed his ardent studies.

"Don't bother him," said Bill.

"It beats me," said Windy Muff, "how a scientist can take an animal's footprint and tell you what the darned thing looks like."

"Did his description agree with what you saw?"

"The truth is," said Windy Muff, "about all I saw was some green blurs. There wasn't time—Ahoy! Look what's comin'."

Bill turned to see the speck of ship on the northeastern horizon.

"That's George Vinson, or I'm a frog's uncle!" Bill leaped up, stripped off his shirt, began waving it. "Right to us over the blue. He's made speed believe me."

Maribeau was aroused by Bill's excited talk, and in a moment he and Windy Muff were following Bill's example, waving banners to the distant yacht.

In less than an hour the trim white craft nosed up within hailing distance of the launch.

Bill looked up at the yacht's prow where the familiar figure of George Vinson stood like a statue against the sky. It was a curious fact, thought Bill, that a man of George Vinson's diminutive stature somehow always gave the impression of being a large powerful person.

Part of it was Vinson's masterful manner. His superior air at this moment, for example, as he unfolded his arms and raised both of them in a sign of greeting, would have nettled Beatrice Riley if she had been here.

As usual, Vinson was bareheaded, and his long black hair blew like a horse's mane in the breeze. As usual, he wore immaculate white from head to foot, including white shoes and white gloves.

"How does it go, my friend?" came the hale greeting of George Vinson.

"Vin, are we ever glad to see you!" Bill shouted.

"Come on up!"

BILL caught the rope that one of Vinson's crew tossed out and tied the launch up against the yacht's gleaming side. He climbed up, scrambling to his feet. George Vinson's hearty handshake was waiting for him.

"It's been many months," said Vinson, smiling majestically. For minutes the two men chatted warmly. Then the smile went out of Vinson's dark gleaming eyes. "Tell me about this—this unaccountable happening. Your message was hard to believe. At first I thought—well, never mind—"

"What?"

"No offense, Bill," said Vinson gazing across the waters reflectively, "but my first thought was, Bill and Beatrice are playing a practical joke on me, just to bring me out to meet them. They're anxious to see me, so they've hatched up this hoax—"

"I only wish that were it, Vin," said Bill. "But nothing could be farther from the truth."

"Are you sure she didn't just strike

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out and swim to yonder island?" George Vinson suggested.

"Hell, no, Vin! You're all wet," Bill snapped. This confident calmness of Vin's could be annoying. It was a trait that tended to give the older man a mastery of any situation. It made Bill feel like a hot-headed youth. "Let me explain. She didn't *swim* away."

"No?" Vinson passed a white glove over his fine flowing black hair.

"She was pulled overboard—there was a rope—and some sort of green sea creature—"

George Vinson's gloved hand froze on the back of his neck. He stared at Bill, then his mystical eyes peered into the sea. The white slits of scars on either side of his neck reddened. He turned sharply to his sailors.

"Bring out the diving suits."

While Bill and one of Vin's sailors changed into the diving outfits, there was a general recounting of all details of Bea's strange departure. Windy Muff and Maribeau climbed aboard the yacht to add their share of the account. Maribeau sketched a webbed foot. Windy stuck to his story that the creatures were green blurs kicking through the water.

And all the while George Vinson stood with hands on hips and head high, like something carved of granite.

"We're a full ten miles from the islands," he said finally. "We'll scout along a trifle closer. Everyone keep a sharp watch on the waters close about."

BILL climbed back into the launch, and Windy and the scientist followed. They swung the launch around to follow in the wake of the yacht. They could see the Napoleon-like figure of Vinson measuring his steps along the deck, and Bill pulled up within voice range. But the only interchange of conversation was a warning from Vinson to keep the diving helmet ready and keep a sharp lookout. Then—

"Look out!" "Watch it, there!" George Vinson and a sailor both shouted at once.

Bill whirled in time to see it happen. A loop of lithe seaweed rope spun out of the water's surface within ten feet of the launch. The loop fell over the head and shoulders of the scientist. The rope tightened with a jerk.

For a split second Maribeau was almost overboard and gone. The rope went taut like an irresistible steel cable and started off with him.

But the scientist's hands and knees hooked the side of the launch, and in the same instant Bill dived to catch his feet. The rope snapped off an arms length beyond the edge of the boat.

Maribeau shrank back, muttering profanity in a foreign tongue. He jerked the tightly corded seaweed off his shoulders, flung it to the bottom of the boat, wiped his slime-covered hands on a handkerchief.

"I saw the critters," Bill gasped. "Just as you caught yourself and the rope went tight."

Maribeau's white face nodded. He had evidently seen them too, but just now he was too scared to say so.

"I seen three," said Windy Muff. "But there musta been more, the way they was pullin'. And if that rope hadn't broke—" Windy stopped to scratch his head. "What the devil were those things? They had arms like monkeys, and prickly spines like big lizards —"

"I'd give ten years of my life," Maribeau uttered in a scared whisper, "for just one specimen."

"Wonder what they'd pay for one of us," Windy grunted.

Bill closed the diving helmet down over his shoulders and all talk dimmed

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and melted together like tunnel sounds. The air-tight suit was a flimsy affair, unsuitable for extreme depths, and the oxygen supply was meager. But Bill was eager for a look under the surface.

Bill waved a signal to Vinson that he was ready to go over. But again Vinson was shouting something.

Then the sound of a heavy splash seeped into the bell-jar head-piece, Bill turned, saw the agonized fright in Maribeau's face. *Windy Muff was gone!*

Or rather, he was *going*. A seaweed rope was dragging him down. Bill hastily checked the fastenings of his air-tight suit and dived.

The force of gravity was with him on his first plunge for depth. He cut down through the water with a powerful stroke. The retreating figure of Windy Muff was a shadowy blur straight ahead of him. Those two fleeting spots of light were Windy's bare feet.

And Bill was almost on them. If the fellow would just stop his senseless kicking—

FOR an instant Bill had the sailor by the toe. But the green creatures must have felt the tug. They suddenly jerked Windy Muff away with frantic speed. Bill couldn't match it—not in a bulky diving suit. The shadowy forms pulled out of his reach and were gone.

That would be the last of Windy Muff, thought Bill. By this time the poor fellow must have taken in a lungfull of water. Bill started to climb.

But at that moment he caught sight of a dim yellow circle of light somewhere farther beyond—and below. He plowed toward it. It had all the look of an artificial light. This was incredible.

He was down deep now. In spite of the inflated suit, the water crushed hard against his sides. Gravity was against him, too, and he had to fight water to keep from being buoyed up.

The circle of yellow was expanding into half a globe that streaked the waters with zig-zagging spangles. There was activity somewhere in that vicinity Now the shreds of light were half clouded with a shower of white sand. So this was near the bottom. They must be imprisoning Windy in one of those transparent tubs. But it was all too black for Bill to see. He crept closer.

By this time the dome of light was on a level higher than his eyes. Suddenly he saw the sharp-toothed outlines of a green sea creature, then a second, and a third. They were passing like sentinels around the top of what appeared to be a cylindrical tank. Its vertical walls were solid black, but the light that fountained out of the transparent top gave it form.

A quick movement from one of the green sea creatures warned Bill. They were on the alert. One of them crossed over the light and he caught a perfect picture of it. Its beady little magenta-ringed eyes were darting about, on sharp watch for trouble. The spines over its back were bristling.

What effect, he wondered, would those spines have on a flimsy diving suit like his? Those were fighting spines. A row of them armored the back of each leg, too. They were like elonyated fins, or they might have been rows of thin knife-blades connected by webs.

It was hard to tell, under the distorting water, how large these creatures were. But Bill's best guess was that they were three or four feet long. He was certainly not prepared for an encounter with one of them, much less a band that knew how to work together.

He shrank back. His oxygen would soon be gone. If he could retreat undiscovered, enough would be accom-

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plished for the moment. For by this time, he knew, Windy Muff was either drowned or else imprisoned in an upright tank of compressed air. That left Bill free to follow either of two lines of action.

He could swim back to the yacht for a rope to attach to this undersea cylinder. All hands on deck might be able to lift it, and Windy Muff with it.

Or Bill could come back with a fresh supply of oxygen and wait to see what the creatures might do with their prisoner. That would be his cue as to what had happened to Bea.

One of the other of these plans—but he had better have a quick talk with George Vinson first. He started up.

Then as his eyes came on a level with the dome of light he caught sight of the prisoner. It was not Windy Muff. It was Beatrice Riley.

CHAPTER V

ON THE instant all of Bill's neatly built plans toppled into confusion. The waters about him became a chaos of flashing prisms as he automatically fought to stop his upward climb.

The light must have flooded over his helmeted face, for now Bea was looking up at him. There was a flick of smile with her recognition, cut short by an expression of shock.

Under less perilous circumstances Bill would have interpreted that shocked look as embarrassment. Bea could have been no less scantily clothed if she had been in her diving costume. Obviously her fight against being captured had cost her her outer garments.

But her shock was plainly one of fear. Her lips were uttering anguished warnings.

"Bill! Be careful!"

In a glance Bill saw five or six of the green sea creatures were drawing back into a group. Their beady little eyes were staring at him. The bright red lines around their mouths seemed to draw tight, as if in cynical smiles. They were hovering in readiness to attack.

Bill's glance flashed back at Bea. She was trying to shake her head at him. But her actions were obstructed by instruments which Bill had hardly noticed at first. They appeared to be two large electrodes, one fastened to each side of her head.

There was no time to wonder what all of this strange paraphernalia might mean. Already the sea creatures were coming toward him.

They bounced over the light in V formation—five of them. Their necks bowed like the necks of chariot horses. In fact, there was a strange resemblance between their heads and the heads of horses. Their monkey-like arms pawed the water, they reared their spiny backs and plowed straight for Bill's midsection.

Bill flung himself in a quick somersault. The heavy transparent headgear was the least vulnerable part of his costume. He was barely quick enough to take the blow of their attack on his head. Their spines clicked past like a course-toothed saw scraping his diving helmet.

His instincts told him to descend. There was darkness below. The light from overhead would play an advantage to whoever was nearest the bottom.

The green water-horses were right after him. He kicked a spray of white sand at them, then made a hard curved plunge around the base of the upright cylinder.

But they were in their element, swishing through these dark waters. At once they were coming at him from both directions. With savage fury they shot over his arms shearing the sleeves of his diving suit. The waters beat in

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upon his arms like sledge-hammers.

Back the green devils came from all directions. Their spines were steel sharp. He felt one long sweep of saw-tooth points rip the full length of his spine.

That was the last of his diving suit. Its protection was gone. Only the shreds of it clung to his wrists and feet. He kicked out of it.

The pressure flung water up into his face like a blast from a fire hose, and then his helmet bounded off. He was at the mercy of the deep. His ear-drums were near to bursting.

HE WAS holding half a breath. But it would never last him till he climbed to the surface. He was too nearly done in with exhaustion. The pain from the gashes and scrapings of spines was like fire. He was losing blood. A faintness was sweeping in on him.

Bill tensed his muscles into steel armor to fight the crushing weight of water. Could he chance the climb to the surface?

The five savage horse-faced creatures were obviously waiting for him to come up into the light again. To rip his body wide open? He could make out their distorted silhouettes at the upper edge of the lighted dome. Their lithe arms were paddling restlessly. They seemed about to plunge again—four of them. But the fifth. . . .

Bill was uncertain whether to trust his eyes. The fifth of the creatures—the large one with yellow Z-shaped streaks on each side of its green sides—seemed to be holding the other four back. A few bold waggles of the creature's head caused the other four to slide back into the darkness. The last Bill could see of them they were swimming away.

Bill's lungs were near to bursting. He saw a leap of the big "Yellow-Z" toward the upper edge of the cylinder.

At once a square of light appeared at Bill's feet. It was a welcome sight—a door at the base of the cylinder. It had slid open, inviting him. Inside there would be compressed air.

Bill would have entered if the place had been a fiery furnace.

He plowed through the foot-square aperture, rose through a series of valves that drew him up automatically. Suddenly the hammering water was gone. Air struck his face.

Air! His breathless gasp resounded in the cylinder like the intake of a gas engine. Air!

A floor pushed up solid and dry against his feet. Now he could feel the sting of air against his gashed arms and the stripe along his back. It was a welcome sensation, in spite of the light trickles of blood.

Blackness was sweeping in on him. He was vaguely aware that he was groping at the smooth panelled cylinder walls, that Bea Riley was beside him, that her arms were supporting him.

But the mad exertion had cost him his consciousness. His fainty head lopped against Bea's side, and everything went black.

CHAPTER VI

BILL scraped his wrists across his face and rubbed an eye open. Colors swam before him in a bleary fog.

He took a long breath. His lips were dry and swollen. He dimly realized he'd been thirsting for more oxygen. The air was stifling. He was still in the big upright cylinder with Beatrice.

Such nightmares! He'd dreamed he was inside an iron lung that had shrunk into a silvered radio tube, Bea was there too, trying to keep him from falling.

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The dream made her a part of the electrical instrument. Spasms of electricity had been shocking her, so the dream went, until finally her arms had weakened and dropped him. He'd fallen to the floor of the tube, lain there. His blood had seeped away. And Bea was powerless to help him. She was only a part of the radio tube.

The misery of the dream came back to him as he lay coiled on the floor of the tube. But the dream was partly true, he knew.

His back was no longer bleeding, however, and he knew that the scraping he had suffered from the sea creature's fins had not hurt him seriously.

His elbow was pressing against Beatrice's feet. It was a comfort to know she was still there, though she looked very pale and tired.

Again Bill slipped off into troubled sleep, and the same weird nightmare went round and round.

Then a sudden jolting and rocking of his prison floor brought him back to consciousness. The dream vanished. Bea was still there, with the electrical instruments fastened to the sides of her head.

A panic of terror struck Bill anew. What were those strange electrical instruments? What were they doing to her?

Her eyes were closed. In the ghastly yellow glow she looked deathly.

"Bea! What's happening?" Bill whispered.

Her eyes opened, she reached a hand down to him, helped him to his feet.

"I'm all right, Bill," she said. "Just dozing."

"They're not electrocuting you or anything?"

"Hardly." Beatrice gave him a mysterious little smile.

"I was a sap to faint away," Bill muttered. "We must be nearly out of oxygen. We've got to get out of there before it's too late."

The uprights cylinder gave another lurch. Bill's weight struck the wall and the cylinder tottered precariously.

"Where the hell are they taking us?"

"We'd better get down," said Bea. "We're so top-heavy we almost crashed."

"That'd be all right with me—if we could climb past those devilish things —"

"Horse-fish," said Bea.

"Whatever you want to call them," Bill growled. He went down stiffly on his knees. The cylinder coasted along a little more smoothly. And when Beatrice succeded in unfastening the electrical instruments so she could crouch closer to the floor, the strange undersea prison rolled along as steadily as something on rubber tires.

"We're learning," said Beatrice. "It's better to cooperate with them."

"Cooperate!" Bill barked. "The thing for us to do is get out."

"They'd pounce on us again, Bill, just like before. They're smart."

BILL searched her eyes. Her tone of voice had carried a strong hint of respect for what she had called the "horse-fish." Did she know anything about these wily creatures?

"We've got to make a break," Bill snapped, rising again with hands braced against the walls. "Get your breath. Let's take our chances—"

"Against the open sea, Bill?"

"There's a yacht up above. He's waiting for us."

"Not Vinson?" Bea cried.

His affirmative nod terrorized her. She sprang up and clutched his arms. Then the vertical walls swayed and fell.

The water valves groaned and one of them sprang slightly open. A flat blade of water dashed in.

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"Come on, Bea!" Bill gasped, scrambling to his hands and knees—for the lurch of the tank had thrown the two of them into a heap. "Now's our chance. We're trapped here unless—"

"No, Bill—"

"Don't be afraid. What's the matter?"

"Does Vinson *know* I'm down here?"

"Why?"

"Does he?" Beatrice was almost screaming.

"He knows the horse-fish pulled you off the ship. He's *got* to know we're still alive. He has some divers—"

"Look!" Beatrice breathed with relief. "They're setting us upright. We're still safe here."

"I tell you we're getting out of here!" Bill snapped hotly.

"Go back to Vinson if you want to," she said in a chill voice. "But don't tell him I'm here. I'd rather die."

"Bea!"

It was all that Bill could manage to say at the moment. He let his head fall back against the wall. This was more than he could fathom. How could she hold such an abhorence for George Vinson? Even now in the face of death her mysterious single hatred overshadowed everything else.

Now the righted tank was again riding along the sandy sea bottom taking them to some unknown destination.

"Bea," Bill pleaded, "can't you tell me what it is?"

She nodded slowly, looked into Bill's eyes with confidence.

"You've always said Vinson was a right fellow, Bill. You've called him good—and sincere—and honest—"

"Well?"

"He *is*," she said quietly. "He's all those things and more. *I knew him before you did.*"

"Bea!"

"He's true blue, Bill. That's why I can't face him. *I'm not!*"

"WHAT are you talking about?" Bill swept his hand across his forehead dizzily. "You're true blue, honey. I'd swear it. Hell, what's this all about? It doesn't make sense."

"Don't try to understand, Bill. Just listen to me. I'm not crazy. I know this part of the sea. I even know what these horse-fish are up to. It was just a chance that they took me off the boat instead of someone else. I was horrified when it happened, naturally—on your account. But I can take my chances—"

"You're talking wild—"

The valves slid open and a gust of pure fresh air filled the cylinder.

"There's no time to tell you more," Beatrice whispered. "Take my word for it. If you love me, Bill, don't ask questions now—"

"Do I take you back with me or don't I?"

"You—if you can—*but not Vin!"*

Bill was breathing heavily. He was scarcely aware that the cylinder was gliding along with a low grinding noise like a metal cart over sands. He only knew he was breathing air again, his mind was clearing, he was thinking fast. And his fighting spirit was about to bound out of hand.

"So you've known Vin before." Bill could feel his cheeks redden. "Has he been in love with you? . . . Is he now?"

Beatrice glanced sharply toward the cylinder floor as the valves clanked. She whispered, "They're coming after you."

"If I had a knife I'd slit their bellies," he hissed.

"No!" There was more than terror in her whisper. "We're at their mercy—both of us. Watch them, Bill . . . *Study them.*"

"While they rip my back to shreds?"

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"When the time is right I'll send you word. Until then—*Wait!* That's all I can tell you."

Through the wide-open valves Bill saw the horse-fish beckoning him to come. Only his faith in Beatrice made him obey.

The last of the rectangular doors closed behind him. He was outside the cylinder, breathing the free air of an immense cavern. And in the half-light that sifted down from a lofty ceiling and towering rock walls he glimpsed the strangest city he had ever seen.

CHAPTER VII

THERE was so much movement close about him that he had no time to take in the details of this immense underground world.

He glanced back at the cylinder from which he had just emerged. The twenty-eight or thirty horse-fish surrounding it paid no attention to him. They evidently meant to keep Beatrice imprisoned, for she had not emerged. Now they were pressing levers to lock the valves.

Their cunning hands grappled with the ropes hooked to its sides. It rolled back down the wet tracks with a crunching of metal wheels over wet gravel. Bill drew back out of the way, watched the big instrument move along, silhouetted against the wide cobweb of artificial lights on the nearest wall.

The horse-fish worked together better than any team of circus animals. They worked with intelligence. Every horse-fish knew what he was about. Together they pulled the upright "iron-lung" down the roadway into the water.

This was the path by which it had come in from the sea. The tracks proved that. So did Bill's sharp sense of direction. That big circular steel door half under water must be one of a series of locks that shut out the sea.

For Bill knew that this place was below sea level. He had never ascended, since his dive; moreover the very air pressure on his eardrums argued that this cavern floor was deep.

Beatrice, still imprisoned, was quickly carted away. As she was passing through the circular opening a gush of imprisoned sea water rushed into the narrow channel, sloshing past the cylinder's transparent dome.

Bea looked back to Bill. The intent expression, the slight shake of the head, seemed to say, "Don't forget!"

Then in his final glimpse of her Bill saw that two horse-fish had climbed up into the cylinder to replace the electrical clamps on her head.

Now she was gone. The swarm of horse-fish kicking along at the sides of the cylinder passed into darkness. The circular steel door closed.

"Well, I'll be damned," Bill said aloud.

"It's got me goin' too, pal," said a voice back of him. It was Windy Muff, sauntering up and planting a lazy elbow on Bill's shoulder.

"I can't figure—" Bill stopped with a gulp. *"Windy!* Where the dickens did you come from?"

"I went to sea in a tub," said Windy with a dry cackle. "They just now took me out of one of those undersea go-carts —only they had to pull me out with ropes."

"I thought you'd be drowned—"

"They pumped life into me—then scared it outa me again. I can't look 'em in the face without turnin' ten shades of white."

"WINDY, I'm darned glad you're alive!" Bill smiled grimly. "But you know you've fallen into a devil of a mess down here."

"It'd be a heap easier on the nerves

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to be dead. Was *that* the gal?"

Bill nodded. "Looks like they're taking her back to sea. This strip of water is the slippery slide to the outside world, if my directions are straight."

The dark waters surged at the channel walls and proceeded to drain away through the circular door. Somewhere pumps were working.

"I think you're right," said Windy. "That's the way *we* came through."

"We?"

"The critters got in my go-cart with me to shake the water out of my lungs," Windy explained. "Then they crawled out again to help pull me through the locks. There was a spell of blackness, and when it lifted I was *here.*"

"Here!" Bill echoed glumly. He gazed around. "My great guns, what a cave! A whole underground city."

"Ain't it!" Windy Muff sounded a forlorn note. "If I ever get back to tell about this, they'll never believe me."

"Don't worry about ever getting back," said Bill, nudging his companion.

Several horse-fish were watching the two of them from the not-too-friendly distance of fifteen or twenty yards.

As a matter of fact, the creatures appeared to be *listening*—though Bill had no way of knowing whether this were possible.

One of the six or eight more attentive horse-fish had a familiar look. His green sides were marked with yellow zig-zag stripes resembling the letter Z.

"That fellow," Bill whispered to Windy, "came near to ripping my backbone out. We clashed somewhere out there beyond the wall."

"They've got damned dangerous looking spines," Windy muttered. "Hell, he *did* tear up your back a bit, fellow. You oughta unroll a yard of tape and pull yourself together. Feel bad?"

"Not now," said Bill. "Seems like it clotted and began healing as soon as I got out of the water. Strange . . . Look, they're gathering in on us."

Like so many loafers and stragglers stopping at a street corner to look at a pair of out-of-town elephants, the horse-fish came closer. From numerous ponds and rivulets and branching caves of the immediate neighborhood they came. Some seemed reluctant to leave the water, perhaps because of inertia. They were obviously adapted to land. Once out of water they came striding on their hind legs.

Some came timidly, like so many bashful schoolgirls. Some strutted, like wise old frogs out of a fairy legend, weighted down with burdens of too much knowledge. Some tossed their horse-fish heads high in an attitude of snobbery and sauntered along with their webbed hands on their trim green hips.

But the most business-like specimens marched up boldly, twirling their lithe seaweed ropes.

THESE brisk marchers were creatures of responsibility, there was no doubt about that. Bill thought he detected a superior sharpness in their glassy spines.

"We're in for it," Muff whispered, turning ten shades of white.

"Don't start anything, Windy," Bill mumbled. "I've had a *tip.*"

"Hasn't *she* got you in enough trouble?"

"S-s-sh. They're listening . . . That 'Yellow-Z' is watching me like a hawk."

Two of the horse-fish advanced boldly, placed slipknotted ropes around the wrists of each man, led them across the wet gravel beach. Bill thought it best to humor them. He offered no resistance.

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"See all that pinkish light way up yonder?" Windy whispered as they plodded along.

"What about it?" Bill asked guardedly.

"Could be daylight," said Windy. "If we'd jerk loose and make a run for it—"

"That's a good two miles away," said Bill, "and we don't know these underground paths. If these horse-fish can run like they can swim we wouldn't get far."

"They're built to swim like fish," Windy whispered.

"And run like horses. Take it easy, Windy."

"Easy! Ugh!" Windy became less guarded in his talk. "My instinct says fight. Tear into 'em with rocks—"

A sharp jerk of the rope on Windy's wrist silenced him. He rolled his eyes toward Bill and whispered cautiously, "Did you see that?"

Bill nodded. "They *heard* you—and understood, by George."

"It's uncanny. I don't believe it. It just *happened*. I'll prove it." Windy ceased his whispering and said in a normal voice. "Bill, in about a minute I'm gonna slice the hearts out of a couple of these green-bellied—"

Jerk! The rope pulled so sharply it snapped. For a moment Windy had the wild eye of a bull calf that breaks out of its halter.

Windy might have had a hot inspiration to take flight, but Bill saw the notion cool. The way the spines suddenly bristled over those horse-fish was enough to make anyone think twice. Windy stood calmly while his guardian horse-fish slipped another loop over his wrist, and the party moved on.

"*Now* what do you say?" Bill whispered.

"Nothing out loud," Windy retorted. "Devilishly odd, though . . . They musta been disturbed by my tone of voice. They didn't understand the words, do you reckon?"

Bill started to answer, but he saw the eyes of one of his captors roll at him curiously. *They were listening.* Bill was sure of it.

"If they hear, it's damned funny they don't talk," Windy said under his breath. "I haven't heard a squeak out of any of 'em."

"I'll swear I heard some voices in the distance when they first brought me out into the cavern."

"What kind of voices, Bill? Frog croaks—or horse whinneys?"

"Sort of *human* voices, I thought," said Bill, trying to recapture the fleeting impressions of a few minutes before. "Hard to tell, though, with all the echoes floating around through these caverns."

THE party followed a crooked trail along the natural rock wall. They came to a stop at a circular steel door with a white X painted across it.

Two horse-fish opened the door and silently motioned Bill and Windy in. It was a cavern chamber. Low artificial lights were burning. Bill walked in, Windy followed, and the door closed after them.

The room was unoccupied, and that fact was enough to make it inviting. Bill dropped down on the sand-floor and sighed, "Home. Don't wake me till breakfast."

"Jail," said Windy. "Don't wake me till the execution . . . At least we won't have to face those damnable green devils as long as this lasts."

"No?" said Bill. "Take a look at our ocean view."

The room was partly natural cavern formations, partly artificial walls. But across to the right there was a large glass window. Choppy little waves of gray-green water sloshed against the

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lower half of it. No skies or horizons were visible. This patch of sea was imprisoned within what appeared to be an endless adjoining cavern. Only the plate glass kept it from pouring into Bill's and Windy's rocky cell.

A horse-fish was padding gently along the surface of the water—Yellow Z. He came up to the window, pressed his nose against it.

Windy Muff took one look and burst into profanity. He'd never eat or sleep, he declared, if those blinkety-blank critters kept staring at him.

"As long as you haven't any bed or food," Bill chuckled, "you're not losing anything." He rose, sauntered over to the window, gazed out at Yellow-Z. "The fellow's as friendly as a pet dog."

"Yeah?" Windy snorted. "Well, get him to lead us outa here . . . Ain't he the same one that sliced you down the back?"

"Right . . . And then protected me from another attack. I can't understand it."

"Sounds screwy, but if you say—Bill! Look at these foot tracks!"

Windy pointed to a confusion of marks in the sand. Bill bent over them. They were human foot tracks. The chamber floor was full of them.

"So we aren't the first to drop into this," Bill muttered. "They're old tracks, though. Maybe years old."

"Maybe we'll be old before we get out," Windy rejoined.

Nothing more was said for some time. Bill explored the cavern chamber. His thoughts were in a whirl. Undoubtedly all these mysteries had their meanings. Here in one corner, for instance, was one of those miniature street lights—a pink globe mounted on a pair of ebony legs. He had noticed several such lights on his way to this jail. The underground city he had glimpsed had been dotted with them.

Pink street lights that stood not more than four feet high . . . A window opening into another vast cavern half-filled with sea . . . Human foot tracks all over this prison floor . . . And somewhere out in the deep waters Beatrice Riley encased in a metal cylinder with an electrical apparatus clamped to her head . . . And all through the caverns and out in the sea, myriads of horse-fish—strange hybrid creatures that worked like men—and listened to men's talk—but never spoke.

What could it all mean?

BILL paced until he was dripping with perspiration. His confusions only deepened. Windy Muff had fallen asleep by this time, and somehow that seemed the sensible thing to do.

In one of the natural rock alcoves Bill found a spring of fresh water. He drank his fill, bathed himself. He spliced the scanty shreds of diving suit that clung to his body, managed to convert the torn strips into fairly comfortable trunks. The air was so warm that he felt no need for any more clothing.

Then he nestled down in a bed of fine sand and treated himself to a sleep.

A clank of the chamber door awakened him. He sprang up with a start. His dreams had been beset by dangers, and this sudden intrusion found him alert for an attack.

"Windy, they're coming in! Wake—"

But Windy was no longer sleeping. Bill's glance swept the room to catch the sailor calmly kneeling beside the ebony legs of the pink light globe. He turned to Bill with a confident wink.

"They're bringing us dinner," said Windy. "Needn't get excited."

"Dinner? How do you know?"

The circular door had opened and now four horse-fish marched in, each bearing a corner of a tray of food. They set the tray down on a flat shelf of rock,

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turned and went out. In a moment the circular door clanked closed.

Windy Muff sauntered over to the tray, picked up a nicely browned fish and began to eat.

Bill simply glared. "Well, I'll be damned. Are *you* in cahoots with this gang of green bellied monsters too?. . . or have they hypnotized you? . . . Don't eat it, you fool. You'll be poisoned."

Windy Muff grinned and went on munching. "Tastes good to me. Better try some."

Bill looked across to the window. Yellow Z was still loafing out there in the water, his red ringed eyes keeping watch.

"You said you wouldn't eat as long as the critters watched you," Bill mocked. "Look at Yellow Z. He's got the same stupid grin on his face that you've got.

"Maybe he's had a good dinner too," said Windy. "Join me?"

"No," said Bill. "I'm too smart to take poison."

Then he caught a second whiff of the delicious fried fish. He edged closer, nibbled a sample. It was irresistible. He sat down beside the tray and ate like a horse.

Windy leaned back against a rock, locking his freckled fingers back of his head for a pillow.

"I've discovered something, Bill. Kinda made me feel different toward these beasts."

"Well?"

"Remember what Maribeau said about those foot tracks? They looked like overgrown Surinam toads—"

"But this was the wrong ocean for animals from Dutch Guiana—"

"Remember he mentioned that those toads don't have any tongues? . . . Well, maybe these critters don't have much in common with the specimens he was talking about, except for their webbed feet and their spiny backs. But I've got it figured out that they also don't have tongues."

"Because they don't talk? said Bill skeptically.

"Because they *do* talk in *a different way.*"

WINDY rose and walked over to the pink light globe. He knelt beside it, thrust his head between the two ebony posts so that one of his ears rested against each.

"Come try this, Bill, if you ain't afraid of gettin' electrocuted."

Windy drew back to watch Bill with glowing eyes.

The ebony posts were cool against Bill's cheekbones as he wedged his head between them. Whatever the material was, it had enough elasticity to fit snugly against his ears. He listened. At first he heard nothing. Then, a weird flow of communication . . . *thought-waves*..... ....

"Have you finished dinner yet? . . . We'll come for the tray as soon as you're through . . . You're prisoners . . . Don't try to get out . . . We can be severe if necessary . . ."

The challenge sent a flare of hot temper through Bill's swimming brain.

". . .. No use to fly off the handle . . . That won't get you anywhere . . . You wouldn't be the first *upper-world* man we've ripped to shreds . . . We turn loose on upper-world men as quick as we do on *spiny-men* . . . So my words have you guessing, have they? . . . You haven't heard of *spiny-men?* . . . Take a look across the river to the other city . . . But don't get too many ideas about exploring around . . . You're staying right here as long as we need you . . ."

Bill jerked his head out of the weird telephone. He was breathing hard, his fingers were quivering.

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"Didja hear voices?" Windy asked eagerly.

Bill nodded uncertainly. "I got a message, all right—a long, rambling one. But I didn't *hear* a thing."

"Different, ain't it?" Windy's grin froze in an expression of puzzlement. "The first time I listened in I wanted to tear those poles out by the roots and beat myself over the head. I thought I was goin' nuts, hearin' things *that couldn't be heard.* Then I thought how godawful hungry I was, and they picked it up."

"How'd you happen to try in the first place?"

"Saw some horse-fish doin' it. Back along our inside wall I found a little barred window that gives a squint of the city. Or rather, both cities—one in each side of the cavern."

"My message," said Bill, "mentioned the *other* city. And there was a lot of talk about *spiny-men.* What the devil are they?"

"Never heard of them," Windy said in denial.

"The uncanny thing, though," said Bill, eyeing the pink light globe suspiciously, "was the way that voice—only it wasn't a voice—kept answering me. The instant I thought a question, it answered."

Windy waved his hands helplessly. "Don't be askin' me how."

Bill began pacing again.

Windy chuckled mirthlessly. "Now I know what made the foottracks all over this place. Whoever was penned up in this joint last went nuts tryin' to dope out that noiseless phone."

"Listen, Windy," said Bill sharply. "You watched me while I was getting that message a moment ago. Did I ever talk any—out loud, I mean?"

"Not a word," said Windy.

"Then how the devil could that horse-fish chop me off with an answer every time I *thought* a question?"

"And how could he talk back to you without a tongue?" Windy shrugged. "Didn't I tell you they've got a different way of talkin'? This is it. Come back to the barred window and you can see 'em headin' into phone booths all over town."

BUT at that instant a flash of green outside the big glass window stopped bill in his tracks. Yellow Z had suddenly fled the waters.

"Musta forgot an appointment," Windy cracked.

Then came wild splashing over the water's surface. It was a chase. A bronze body swam past so close that his elbow bumped the plate glass. Bill caught sight of the coarse-featured masculine face. The man shot on, swimming fast.

Close on his heels came five horse-fish. Their little red-lined faces were blazing with fury. Their red slits of gills were working hard. Their steely spines bristled with readiness to slice flesh and bones.

Water splashed to the top of the window, blurred Bill's vision. As the glass cleared he saw the chase turn into a deadly fight.

The bronzed man whirled with the alacrity of a fish, his long black hair slapped over his shoulder, his wide flat hands jerked a short thin knife out of his belt. His back lurched up out of the water just before he struck.

In that instant Bill caught sight of the row of sharp points—a dozen or more of them—that lined the fellow's back bone.

"If we could bust that window," Windy yelled, "we might save that man's life."

"No." Bill's jaw was set hard. "It's their battle. Besides, he's not a man. He's a spiny-man."

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CHAPTER VIII

"WHATEVER he is," Windy gasped, "he's committin' suicide, swimmin' in amongst those damned green-bellied rippers."

"Maybe so. I don't know—" Bill's unconscious words gave way to breathless silence. He and Windy both pressed their faces against the plate glass.

That knife in the webbed fingers of the spiny-man was cutting arcs into the water like a windmill wheel with one blade. A splash of red leaped up from the waves. One of the horse-fish plowed off from the rest of the party, kicking around in a circle of its own, dragging a black mass of spilling entrails behind it.

Then, ceasing to kick, the knifed horse-fish hung limply in the waves, only five or six feet beyond the window. The waters around it grew discolored, and the red shroud hid it from view.

"Goodbye, spiny-man!" Windy barked, pointing back to the fight.

Bill saw. The largest of the attacking horse-fish—a creature with a ring of black circling the white dot on his side—leaped clear of the water, clear of the spiny-man's head. Simultaneously he whirled belly-up, caught the spinny-man between the shoulders as he shot back to the water. In that split second the horse-fish spines did their damage. They scraped an ugly red line straight down the spiny-man's horny backbone.

"A question of who's the toughest," Windy muttered. "Only there's no question about it. That gash'll lay the fellow low. All they've got to do now is rip his guts out."

"Watch, Windy!" Bill fairly shrieked. "There's the thing I was telling you—"

The fight was suddenly over. The big horse-fish that had taken the back-to-back slide *stopped* it. He gave an imperious waggle with his head and the three remaining horse-fish shrank back. When one of them threatened to attack again he darted challengingly. All three of his companions were bluffed out. It was obvious, Bill noted, that these horse-fish held a healthy respect for each other's spines, no matter how much they disagreed on their motives.

"I don't get it," said Windy Muff blankly, as he watched the hard-faced spiny-man swim off to safety. "That big fellow with the bull's-eye markings on his sides turned into a friend awful sudden-like."

"That's the very way Yellow Z did when he was fighting me," said Bill. "At the very moment he had me down and could have killed me, he went soft-hearted and called the gang off."

"I don't get it," Windy repeated.

"I don't either," Bill admitted. He lingered at the window until "Bull's-eye" and the other horse-fish swam away. "What about that barred window you were going to show me?"

They followed the wall of their private chamber along the side opposite the sea window. The artificial wall was a patchwork of masonry that filled in between pillars of natural stone. Back in a narrow alcove that reminded Bill of a street car vestibule, bars of light from the larger cavern world seeped in between bars of steel.

"You'll need these," said Windy, unfastening a pair of binoculars from his belt. "Get a focus on that peach-colored haze 'way to your right and you'll see the other city. I'll take myself back to the telephone." . . .

FOR the next two hours Bill stayed at the window studying the lay of the land.

The binoculars brought him a miniature world—or was it two worlds?

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There were two kinds of creatures in it—very different creatures—and yet they had certain pronounced points of resemblance.

The spiny-men (including the spiny-women and spiny-children) lived among the uplands on the farther side of the river. That was the east side, if Bill's sense of direction served him. And what he chose to call uplands were, of course, actually beneath the level of the sea. But the main cavern was so vast and its ceiling so lofty that there was room for little hills and valleys, lakes, waterfalls, innumerable ramifying caves, and one river as broad as a boulevard.

This river appeared to divide the low arched mud huts of the horse-fish, on the west, from the statelier brick and mud homes of the spiny-men, on the east.

The river widened into a lake at what might be called its mouth. It couldn't be seen to flow into the sea, for at this depth nothing less than a system of artificial water gates could empty a river into the sea without allowing the sea to backwater into the whole cavern.

The cavern itself, Bill guessed, had been hollowed out by water during long ages past. Later some caprice of nature, perhaps an overflow of lava from some volcano up above, had spilled the gigantic icicles of rock across the mouth of the cavern. The skyscraper-sized icicles had melted together in a fortress against the sea. And somehow the creatures who had chosen to dwell here had managed to force out the impounded water.

But the horse-fish, at least, were still water-dwellers. Bill, turning the binoculars on the west bank of the river and its numerous inlets, observed that most of the gray mounds of the horse-fish city had no visible doors. The entrances were under water.

One matter was continually confusing, however. There were some houses that he could not classify. Worse, there were some creatures he could not classify. For farther up the stream, he noted, there ceased to be any clear-cut division between the city of the horse-fish and that of the spiny-men. The two appeared to be hopelessly merged. And from this distance he could not tell whether those little creatures molding pottery far up the river were horse-fish or spiny-men.

This was disturbing.

Bill's attention returned to the matter of sunlight. The hazy peach-colored light that had sifted through the ceiling far to the right, perhaps two miles distant, had turned to the amber of sunset, and now it melted into twilight gray.

So this undersea pocket had an outlet to the upper world, thought Bill. The city of the spiny-men had at least a limited daily taste of sunshine, blue sky, clouds.

AS THE last of daylight faded, the lines of artificial lights along the distant wall brought into view a zigzagging trail to the upper world.

A party of spiny-men was ascending that trail, carrying lanterns. Occasionally Bill thought he could see them waving their arms. Now and again he heard the rolling echoes of high voices that might have been laughter and shouting.

Then he caught sight of two figures descending the trail from the upper world, slowly moving down the incline toward the party with the lanterns. At once Bill guessed what was happening.

He chased back to the front of the chamber where Windy was still listening in at the silent phone.

"Let me have it, Windy!"

"Sure. Say—there's a lotta talk

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about a guy named *Vin-Vin*. Would that be your pal?"

"Sure as shootin'! Let me hear!"

"He's surprisin' 'em by droppin' in unexpected. The phones are full of it."

Windy accepted the binoculars, trudged off to see what Bill had seen.

Bill adjusted the ebony posts to his head. In a moment the talk began to come in. It was confused, as if dozens of parties were talking—or rather *thinking*—to each other over the same connections.

But the outstanding news was the same throughout: *Vin-Vin* had returned for his "annual visit" much earlier than expected. There must be some reason. What could it be?

"Did Vin-Vin bring any converts with him?" many would ask.

"There's one guest," the answer would come.

Occasionally, however, the messages would vary. There was one other exciting bit of gossip: The horse-fish had acquired some new prisoners.

"As soon as Vin-Vin is welcomed," some were saying, "he must be informed that the horse-fish have some upper-world prisoners."

The excitement was tremendous. The impact of these events obviously made big talk throughout the spiny-man community. And perhaps the horse-fish community as well. Bill picked up some startling implications.

For one thing, it was a strange fact that the horse-fish and the spiny-men employed a single interwoven system of communication. The horse-fish had access to the conversations of the spiny-men, and vice-versa.

Another striking fact was that George Vinson was evidently a big man in this underground world. The way his return was being heralded, Bill wondered if he might be the ruler.

At any rate these were Vinson's home people. That was a certainty—a very disturbing one. After all the years Bill had known Vin and been allowed to wonder over Vin's peculiarities—his inevitable gloves—his mane of fine hair that flowed over the back of his neck—at last Bill was seeing the man's roots for the first time.

IT MAY have been midnight or later when a silent phone message came to Bill.

He had almost dozed away, listening to the profuse speeches of welcome, hearing the flowery address by *Thork*, first assistant to the spiny-man ruler.

But soon after the whole underground world had seemingly tucked itself away for the night, a crystal-clear thought-wave came over the wires.

"Bill Pierce . . . I'm calling Bill Pierce . . . He may be here as a prisoner — oh, you're there, Bill! You made it! That's remarkable. I was horribly worried."

"I'm all right, Vin," Bill spoke the words aloud in his enthusiasm. "Everything's okay, I guess."

"You sound nervous. Sick or anything?"

"No—that is, my backbone's healing up all right."

"Oh—too bad, fellow. So a horse-fish got you, eh? I was afraid of it. Those things can be fatal, you know. But if luck's with you, you come through *with a friend*. You know what I mean?"

"I guess so," said Bill. "Yellow Z—"

"I'll get in touch with you just as soon as I can make it. I'll be tied up with more or less ceremony through tomorrow. It's inescapable. You'll understand, Bill, after I've had a chance to explain."

Bill made no answer. He felt that

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his limping conversation was widening into a social chasm between them.

"Don't be downhearted, fellow." Vinson mustered a hearty manner. "You know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think we'll find Bea Riley *alive*. I think the horse-fish took her by chance and got away with her. If they did they'll put her to work somewhere near these caverns. So don't lose hope —er—"

Vin broke off abruptly.

Bill struggled to suppress what leaped to the surface of his mind. Vinson, at the other end of the thought-wave telephone, must have sensed his confusion.

"You haven't seen her, have you, Bill . . . Oh, you *have!* . . . Alive?"

"Yes."

"You talked with her?"

"A little," Bill admitted.

"M-m-m." Vin was slightly defensive. "Then she told you—er—about *me*."

"She said she'd known you before. She mentioned you were a right guy—but she's always said that."

"We've got to save her, Bill. It's more than simply saving a life. She's a potential contributor to the race. *My* race. The future generations need her."

"I don't know anything about that," Bill retorted bluntly. "But *I* need her."

"I've got to see you, Bill. Where are you?"

BILL described the prison chamber. He mentioned that Windy Muff had found his way into the same jail.

"Have you seen anyone, other than horse-fish?" Vinson asked. "Any spiny-men, I mean?"

"Only one at close range," said Bill, and he described the fight that had taken place outside his window.

"That spiny-man was Thork, the king's lieutenant," said Vinson, and the mood of his thought-waves tightened with a self-enforced tolerance.

In a more eager humor he returned to the subject of Beatrice Riley.

"You don't happen to know," Vin's thoughts asked, "what they did with Bea—which way they took her—whether she was on foot or in a cylinder-cart—whether they put her to work on a batch of horse-fish eggs, or—"

"Eggs!"

Bill echoed the word with such amazement that Windy bounced up wondering what was the matter.

"If you're orderin' breakfasts," Windy hissed, "make mine—"

Bill waved him away. But Windy's intrusion, he knew was his own good fortune. It enabled him to suppress some answers that might otherwise have leaped over the phone from his mind to Vin's.

That mustn't happen. Bea Riley had made it plain that Bill's good friend Vin wasn't to cross her path.

"I'll talk with you later," Bill managed to say.

"I'll see you soon," Vin concluded as heartily as ever.

Bill, perspiring, moved away from the pink-globed phone, made for the fresh water spring. He needed a cool bath. That conversation had been an ordeal. For all he knew he might have revealed the very thoughts he meant to suppress.

CHAPTER IX

A slush-slush-slush of a distant waterfall beat on Bill's ears. Other than this low intermittent roaring the night was silent. All lights had been dimmed throughout the cavern.

Slush-slush-slush—as rhythmic as the ticking of a grandfather clock.

From the barred window Bill could

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make out the narrow ribbon of water that plunged down a series of falls. The falls were beyond the spiny-men's city, in a high crevice-like branch of the cavern. Earlier in the evening, Bill knew, these falls hadn't been visible. They must have come with the high tides, he reasoned, they would go silent when the waters receded.

Slush-slush-slush. Bill went to work with a chunk of stone, synchronized his strokes to the rhythmic roar, chopped at the wall around the steel-barred window. Probably there were no guards to listen; at any rate the sounds of his battering would be submerged.

Windy roused up from sleep and took his turn at stone-cutting while Bill rested.

"You're a bear for work," he said, as Bill went back to the task. Slowly the stubborn stone wore thin.

One steel bar had just begun to give when the lights of morning began to turn on.

Soon shafts of pink sunlight pressed through the vast ceiling over the eastern section of the big cavern. Meanwhile the wall grew brighter, voices of spiny-children began to echo from across the river. Nearer at hand the brilliant green heads of horse-fish nosed across ponds and inlets. Horse-fish padded across yards of wet sand, gathered in groups, gestured to each other in their own language of signs.

"See if there's anything on the phone, Windy," Bill ordered. "The day's beginning."

Windy groaned out of his sleep, yanked at his towsled red hair as if trying to remember where he was. Then he came up with a start.

"Didja get *through,* Bill?"

"Not quite."

"Dammit, I shouldn't have slept. Why'd you let me do it?"

"You were all in, Windy. Anyway one bar's beginning to loosen. But we'll have to slack up now . . . Oh-oh, they're at the door."

Bill kicked some dust to hide the stone chips at his feet, brushed sand over his ripped and bleeding hands. By the time the circular steel door opened he was lying in the sand, pretending to be half asleep.

The visitors were the four servant horse-fish bringing a tray of breakfast —more fried sea foods on plates of shell. The horse-fish looked around, satisfied themselves that all was well, and went on their way.

BILL and Windy breakfasted and listened at the telephone by turns, but no messages of consequence came through.

Meanwhile the horse-fish with the yellow Z on his sides paddled up to the sea-window to begin his day of watching.

"He makes me nervous," Windy muttered, casting sidewise glances at the sea cavern.

"I wish I could get him on the phone once and see what's eating on him," said Bill. "He's going to cramp our style. Especially if he tells on us."

"He can't see our escape window from his post," said Windy. "We could go ahead—"

"Risky," said Bill. "The tide's going down and the waterfall has nearly stopped. We'd be heard. But we may have to take a chance—"

Bill broke off with a low whistle. He brushed his breakfast aside and sprang to the sea window. *A cylinder was floating past.*

"That's your gal friend again, ain't it?" said Windy.

Bill scarcely heard, he was too busy pounding on the window and beckoning. The upper third of the upright cylinder was floating above the surface

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of the water. Through the transparent domed lid he could see Beatrice. The same instrument was clamped to her head. Her eyes were closed. She looked pale. She was sleeping. Or was she ill—or even—

Sharp chills pierced through Bill's arms down to his fingertips.

But no, she was not dead. She was breathing slowly. He could see her plainly. The cylinder was wafted along by sluggish currents. Passing within twenty feet of the big window it caught light from the prison chamber.

Bill watched, motionless, half hypnotized by the sight. Bea's pallid face revealed such a resigned calmness and patience. As ever, there was that deep, mysterious beauty—

Bill caught his breath.

The cylinder was floating past, now, turning so he could no longer see her.

A strange terror seized him. He drew back from the window clenching his fists. His dread of the unknown suddenly welled up into a nameless horror.

"I don't know what's happening. Watch her, Windy, till I—"

His feet were ahead of his words. He dashed back to the other end of the chamber and into the little stone-walled vestibule with the barred window. He rattled the loosened bar.

Then he heard Windy calling him to come back.

"Look, Bill. What's Yellow Z up to?"

Bill returned on the run. In the preceding moments he had ignored the curious blinking eyes of the horse-fish. But now he saw what the creature was doing. Yellow Z was pushing the cylinder back toward the window, turning it so that the girl's face was toward them.

"How'd *he* know I wanted her to come back?" Bill uttered nervously.

"Damned if he ain't on our side!" Windy chuckled.

"Either that or he's scheming . . . What the hell!"

THE yellow-marked horse-fish whirled the cylinder with astonishing suddenness, grabbed it by a choice hand-hold and went swimming off with it as hard as he could go.

Bill smacked his head against the glass in his eagerness to see where the cylinder was going. That end of the underground lake was too dark to see far. Bill watched until the object diminished to shadowy bubble. It cut an arc through the dark waters and disappeared from sight.

Bill stepped down from the window with the air of a caged lion.

"That durned horse-fish," Windy muttered, "has got a screw loose. He's the most inconsistent critter—"

"I'm gonna get out of here!" Bill yelled, kicking at the sand.

"Didn't he fight you one minute and save you the next? . . . Huh? . . . *Look, Bill!* There's some more comin'. Yellow Z musta seen 'em."

Bill whirled back to the window in time to see a black-haired spiny-man swim into view. It was the same stony-featured spiny-man who had fought here the day before. Thork was the name, Bill recalled. This fellow, according to the telephone messages, was the lieutenant to the king.

The swimmer stopped directly before the window, turned to beckon to someone back of him. Over the silver-tinted waters to the east a few other swimming creatures were following in his wake.

Thork waited, watching them approach. Once he turned his head toward the prison window, and his first half-minute stare at Bill and Windy brought a sour scowl to his face. He

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did not appear to be particularly surprised—and Bill guessed that he had probably heard rumors of their capture. He shrugged and looked away.

Now the rest of the party swam into view; three horse-fish and one more spiny-man. It was not a chase this time. It was more nearly a council. Thork had evidently led the others to this spot to explain what had happened in yesterday's fight, for he began talking and pointing with great animation. A faint rumble of his low voice echoed through the glass, though Bill could understand nothing.

But obviously the three horse-fish were listening critically. They punctuated Thork's rapid-fire story with gestures, occasionally forcing him to change his claims.

Then, for the first time, the face of the second spiny-man came into view. It might have struck Bill as being a handsome face for a human creature whose backbone was lined with little horn-like spines, and whose fingers were connected with webs. But this face was more than handsome—it was intelligent, honest—and definitely familiar. *This was George Vinson.*

Bill should have been prepared for the shock. But somehow he was not. He had never seen Vin before except as a neat little man dressed in white, and never without white gloves. Never without his artistic head of hair flowing loosely to the back of his neck.

In the heat of the conference with Thork and the three horse-fish, George Vinson's bright beady eyes shot a look at Bill. It was a look that said, "I know you're there, friend. I'll get to you when this job's over. One trouble at a time. I'm a busy man down in this world."

IT was startling how much genuine importance there was about Vinson, even when stripped of his fine clothes and swimming about in bathing trunks. Even when arguing with a fellow spiny-man and three horse-fish. When Vin spoke, his words counted.

And they were counting now. He was reeling off his opinions, wasting no words. The horse-fish nodded their agreement. Thork appeared to be swallowing a bitter pill, but he finally nodded too.

Vin gave a wave that seemed to indicate everything was settled.

Then Thork did some more pointing, this time in the direction that Yellow Z had swum away with the cylinder.

"Thork's changed the subject," Windy observed shrewdly. "He lost his argument about the fight, so he's tryin' to start somethin' else."

Bill breathed uneasily. "Do you suppose he saw Bea?"

"What if he did?" said Windy. "Would that be bad?"

"Plenty. She doesn't want to be seen by these spiny-men. She's got some mysterious connections down here. She'll blow up if they find her. Rather than face them, she'd—" Bill's agitation broke loose in a violent snarl. *"I've got to get out of this trap!"*

He caught himself, stopped his nervous pacing. The whole group outside the window were watching him. Expressions of curiosity were on their faces.

"They're talkin' about her, all right, an' us too," Windy whispered. "They'll be in here quizzin' us next. If they do, I won't know whether I'm comin' or goin', that's the devil's truth . . . There they go."

Bill saw Vin disperse the party with a wave of his webbed hand. But the creatures did not all swim away in the same direction. The stony-faced Thork, shooting another cold glance into the prison chamber, sped off in the direc-

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tion Yellow Z had taken the cylinder.

The instant the sea-window was cleared of spiny-men and horse-fish, Bill strode back to the other corner of the chamber. He grabbed a rock, went to work battering the steel bar like a mad man.

Windy spelled him off. In a matter of minutes they succeeded in jerking the first bar out of its sockets. But Bill jammed it back and he and Windy both ducked—none too soon. A gang of horse-fish led by "Bull's-Eye" had trailed into view. Bill could hear them padding along the sandy trail.

Presently they were out of hearing. But other footsteps were approaching. A knock sounded at the circular metal door.

"It's Vin, Bill," came the voice from the other side of the door. "I had to come back the long way around. Are you all right in there? Plenty of food and water?"

"We're okay," said Bill.

"Then I'll settle up this murder mess of Thork's before I come back to get you out," Vin called. "These horse-fish have *their* rights, you know, and it pays to handle them with gloves. You won't worry if it's two or three hours?"

"We won't worry," said Bill.

THERE was a moment of silence. Bill realized his answers had been terse, far from cordial. He added, "Take your time, Vin."

"That's the spirit, Bill." Vin's heartiness was quick to respond. "I'll have this door open before noon. And you must be ready to tell me what you know about Bea."

Another silence.

"Did you hear what I said, Bill? You'll have to help me with Bea."

"I heard."

"Good. We'll have to work some tall strategy on the horse-fish to get her. They're killers, you know, under certain conditions. It's a constant job to hold down the number of fights with them. And we're having to bargain with them, just now, for too many favors. Do you understand the source of their treachery, Bill?"

"Not altogether." Bill was kneeling at the keyhole of the circular door, listening eagerly.

"Then I'd better tip you off right now," came Vinson's voice. "They can be your best friends—or your worst enemies. They're our cousins, in a sense, and they've got a streak of intelligence you won't find a match for anywhere in the upper world. But their emotions are unstable. You understand?"

"Yes," said Bill.

"Their prickly spines may not look like blotters, but that's exactly what they are. Blotters. They absorb the emotions and desires and sentiments of other creatures. If one of them tears along your backbone while he's fighting you, he picks up a whole set of feelings *from you.*"

"So that's it!" Bill gasped. "That's why Yellow Z let me off easy after that first gash."

"Right. *Your* feelings became *his* feelings. That's why they're treacherous, Bill. You may think you've got a horse-fish *friend*—one that'll stall off all possible trouble—but if he scrapes the back of *your enemy* and picks up a new set of feelings—*look out.*"

"I get it," said Bill.

"Now you see what we've got to work with," Vinson concluded. "The sooner we can get Beatrice out of their clutches, without upsetting the apple-cart, the better for everyone. And believe me, Bill, the city of spiny-men will have one tall celebration when they learn that Bea-Bea has come back to them. So long, Bill."

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"Wait. Are you still there?" Bill called at the keyhole.

"Yes?"

"What was this business you mentioned over the thought-phone? Something about eggs?"

"Oh, that. I'll tell you when I come back."

Bill and Windy listened until the footsteps retreated out of hearing. Then they slipped back to the window.

"Any last minute instructions, Bill?" Windy asked.

"Keep your ears to the phone, Windy. If the horse-fish miss me, tell 'em I buried myself under the sand for a nap. Or tell 'em nothing."

With that Bill hoisted himself to the window, wormed through. He turned back to Windy for a last word.

"If you don't hear from me within twenty-four hours, you'll know Bea and I have sneaked through to the surface. Then you can tell Vin thanks, but we couldn't use his help."

CHAPTER X

BILL moved with the stealth of a leopard. He picked his course from shadow to shadow.

He knew the cavern lake could be reached only by a round-about trail. There was hardly a chance he could reach Bea ahead of Thork. He'd hung back like a docile prisoner too long.

But his blood was boiling now. He cursed himself with every leap and bound for letting Bea stay in the cylinder. Now she'd be grabbed by the spiny-men—the very thing she feared most.

Why did she abhor them so?

Bill wasn't sure. But he had a dozen vague guesses—all of them too horrible to face. He was blind to everything, now, except getting her out of this weird hole.

Every time Bill dashed past a pink-lighted pole he felt like stopping to see what new talk was flying through the cave. Thork had probably found her—perhaps the whole spiny-man city knew by now.

And would that city prepare a welcome for her, as Vin had predicted? *What was the spiny-men's city to Bea?* The hot blood of an almost insane anguish pounded through Bill's arteries.

Bea must belong here!

But how could she? Her body was the perfect body of a human being. In the thousands of public appearances she had made in her abbreviated diving costume, her splendid physique had never failed to charm the audience. In the graceful lines of her back there wasn't a hint of spiny-men features. Nor were there any signs of webs between her fingers or toes.

She couldn't be a spiny-woman! And yet—

Bill couldn't throw the thought out of his mind. Pictures flooded upon him—the views he had caught while studying the spiny-men's city through the binoculars.

Yes, he had seen *all* varieties of spiny-folk. Some had merged indistinguishably with the horse-fish. On the other hand some had looked so much like upper-world men, from his distance, that it had left him wondering about it.

Now Bill was nearly a mile east of his starting point. The river's waters, piled deep against the artificial doorways to the sea, were not far ahead. He had followed the trails along the base of the south wall to keep his distance from scattered groups of horse-fish going about their work.

Bill stopped, slipped into a rocky crevice. A party of horse-fish were approaching. He crowded against the rock.

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THE ten or twelve female horse-fish passed without seeing him. They had evidently just returned from the open sea, for they were lugging armloads of fresh seaweed. Bill must be on the right trail.

He raced on. Wherever scraps of seaweed had dropped he grabbed them up on the run, slapped them over his shoulders for camouflage.

At last, taking a chance on being seen from the houses on either side of the river, he slipped up a steep pathway to an opening in the vast curtain of lava rock. Dripping seaweeds had been dragged through the narrow A-shaped pass. Ahead was darkness.

Then his eyes adjusted, he saw the silver edged waters at his feet. This had to be the cavern lake.

Shaking off the cloak of seaweeds, he plunged in and swam back to the west. He knew the speed he could hold for distance swimming. The unlighted cavern might have been an entrance to the end of the world. The black waters were devoid of dimensions, to Bill's eyes. Only the dim outlines of mammoth stone icicles, wet from seepage, gave the cavern any form whatsoever.

Then Bill began to pass big lighted windows. Here again were those ubiquitous signs of the mechanical civilization of upper-world men.

Here was a series of pumping stations. Both spiny-men and horse-fish were working the big crude water-power machines.

Farther on Bill swam past the pink-lighted windows of prison chambers. The rock-walled rooms, though they contained glowing telephones, were empty, for their circular doors stood open. Near the sea-window of one cell an old dry human skull grinned out at Bill—or was it a spiny-man skull?

In either case, it testified to a tragedy of years ago, perhaps starvation, or a battle to death, or an insane suicide.

Now Bill swam past the cell he recognized. He caught a brief sight of Windy Muff with his head at the telephone, his eyes blinking up at the walls. Windy was a statue of bewilderment. Whether the thought-phone was alive with strange messages or whether Windy was day dreaming of the stories he would tell if he ever got back, Bill could only wonder.

Without slackening his strokes Bill sped on.

Then something was swimming toward him. He surface dived. He put many yards back of him before he crawled back to the surface.

The swimming form was back of him now, following in his wake.

Four times he surface-dived, to cut along under the waters at high speed. Then a streak of light cut the race short. The swimming form was Yellow Z.

Still a friend? With an odd sensation of self-consciousness Bill spoke aloud.

"If you're on my side, fellow, take me to that floating cylinder."

He hung back as the horse-fish cut ahead of him.

YELLOW Z swam in a wide arc to the right, Bill in his wake. The cavern lake was narrowing. Slits of light through the ceiling hundreds of feet overhead restored Bill's sense of direction. But those narrow vertical gashes offered no hope of escape.

Suddenly Yellow Z grabbed Bill by the hand and jerked him into the shadowed waters. Yellow Z crawled up on a ledge of dry rock and peeked over cautiously. Bill followed his example.

Sounds of splashing and paddling echoed through the lake-filled canyon. At the bend the rush of swimming figures came into view.

"Thork, again!" Bill muttered under

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his breath. "And Bull's-Eye."

But those two weren't all. A gang of horse-fish were on their trail. Thork had got himself into another mess with the horse-fish!

This time, Bill saw, Thork was avoiding a fight. Or more accurately, Bull's-Eye was preventing it. The white-dotted horse-fish was darting back and forth, keeping the rest of the gang at bay while Thork swam full speed ahead.

His course was back toward the cities —over the same waters Bill had just come. And now Bill saw, with immense relief, that the glass-domed cylinder was in full view almost directly below him.

It was still floating upright, still lighted, still occupied.

Bea's uptilted face was chalk-white, her eyes were closed. She was half-reclining, and the slow rhythmic rise and fall of her breasts told that she was sleeping easily. The instruments at her head had not been moved since he last saw her being towed away from the prison window.

This, then, was where Yellow Z had brought her for safe hiding. And here the lieutenant of the spiny-men had followed.

But Thork's visit had just now been foiled by the savage horse-fish. The splashing echoes of that chase were fading. This moment was Bill's chance.

"Here goes, Yellow Z!" he said aloud. "We're going to crack this safe before you can wink your little red eyes."

The hand of Yellow Z slapped over Bill's wrist as Bill was lowering himself over the ledge. But Bill was in no mood to be restrained. He jerked free, slipped into the water, swam once around the cylinder, and began jerking all the valve levers furiously.

He paid no attention when Yellow Z caught him by the shoulder. He shook the webbed hand off. For now the valves opened and he knew the way in.

He caught half a breath, dived into the water-filled aperture at the cylinder's base. Once he had to kick off Yellow Z's troublesome grab at his ankle. Then he was free to rise through the valves toward the upper floor.

"Bea! Bea!" he called, as he climbed upward. "You've got to get out of here, Bea. Wake up! The spiny-men know you're here. They're laying for you!"

AS HE swunk up to the level where Bea's feet rested he was aware that something more than water had drenched his body during his ascent through the series of floors. A syrupy liquid spilled over his shoulders, and with it came a hundred tickling and scratching sensations. As if he'd broken through a wall of eggs.

The light from the dome of the cylinder blazed down on his dripping body and he saw.

The mess *was* broken eggs—dozens of them. Their brittle white shells had crushed at his touch, and spilled their contents.

Bill couldn't be bothered. He gave his gooey hands a swipe against the cylinder walls, all the while shouting at Beatrice. He slapped her feet. Then rising to stand beside her, he jerked the instruments off her head.

Her eyelids lifted heavily, then fell closed.

"It's me!" Bill uttered. "You've got to wake up, Bea!"

He slapped her cheeks briskly. Her head dropped forward, her eyes were trying to open. Still, her arms hung so limply that Bill knew this was more than the stupor of sleep. It was exhaustion.

"Bill," she whispered faintly. "It's you?"

"Bea, you know it is!" Come on. Snap out of it."

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He tried to take her up in his arms. It was difficult to help her when her body was so limp.

"Where are we, Bill?"

"Getting out of here," Bill puffed as he dragged her down through the mess of broken shells, down into the water-filled valves. "Hold your breath, Bea. Here we go."

Then they were out in the cool waters. Bea was swimming listlessly on her back.

"Hurry, honey," Bill kept urging.

"I'm trying," she said. "But I'm so weak—hungry—"

"Poor kid—you might have died in that cylinder."

"Cylinder . . . Oh!" she gasped.

In the diminishing light Bill saw her eyes widen. She changed to a breast stroke, quickening her speed.

He glanced back. Yellow Z hadn't followed. Instead the friendly horse-fish had again mounted the ledge, and there he sat as motionless as a moody gargoyle on a cathedral wall.

FOR THE next twenty minutes Bea swam hard, and Bill knew she had no energy for talking.

But when they approached the pink lights of the prison windows, she slackened her pace.

"We'd better cut around," she said. "If the natives find out I've come back—"

"They already know, Bea," said Bill. "That's why—"

"*Who* knows?"

"Thork, the king's lieutenant. He followed to the cylinder, but the horse-fish drove him off."

"Oh!"

Her faint tone conveyed a secret hurt that was too deep for words. Then as if bristling spines were suddenly plunged into her flesh she cried.

"Bill! *How* did you get me out?"

"Through the valves."

"I mean, *how—without breaking the eggs?*" Her voice was wild with terror. "You didn't—"

"I busted 'em all over myself," said Bill. "I didn't know they were in there. Why?"

"Oh, Bill!" she was sobbing bitterly. She caught a muffled breath, let her face drop under the surface, and swam on so fast that Bill was left more than a length behind.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN they reached the A-shaped pass to the main cavern Bea dropped on the bank utterly exhausted. Bill lifted her up into his arms and carried her.

But the webs of light along the vast cavern wall opened her languorous eyes.

"Bill," she breathed. "We've got to hide—quick."

"Just from the spiny-men—or the horse-fish too?"

"Oh, you poor idiot!" she cried angrily. "The maddest spiny-man would never hope to live twenty-four hours if he had crushed a horse-fish's eggs. It's fatal."

Bill felt the weight of tragedy hovering, about to descend. Every minute of his return swim he'd suspected this was coming, and yet he'd kidded himself with the silly hope it wouldn't be so serious.

"Then they'll *all* be set for a capture—"

"Bill, frankly it would have been a lot easier if you'd just taken poison—and given a dose to me."

"To *you!*" Bill cried. "You didn't commit the blunder. I was the one. If they think they can catch me and kill me for it, let 'em try. But I'll clear you, if it's the last thing I—"

"Bill, you can't. I'm the *guiltiest,* in

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their eyes," she whispered hoarsely. "I was charged with *giving my thoughts* to those embryo horse-fish. I pledged I'd do it. That was my job . . . Don't look at me so, Bill."

"You're not serious!"

"You can't appreciate it," Bea moaned, "until you've lived down here. But there's a streak of something different in these green sea creatures—an uncanny streak of wisdom that's not matched anywhere in nature. Not even the smartest upper-world people we know can store up knowledge the way these horse-fish can. The spiny-folk sometimes have a little of it—but not much."

"What *are* you talking about? Is this some ungodly superstition?"

"It's a quirk of nature, Bill. These savage horse-fish can *inherit* men's thoughts. They're like sponges or blotters. Even before they hatch out of eggs, they begin to take on their patterns of thought. It's very strange to you, I suppose—"

"It's remarkable—but what kind of thoughts could you possibly transfer to unhatched eggs, cooped up in that cylinder?"

"Any thoughts that happened to pass through my mind. I just lay there daydreaming and sleeping. Whether I happened to dream about diving exhibitions or sailing back to the States or reading books there were sure to be plenty of elementary ideas mixed in."

"Such as?"

"Well, habits of walking and talking, with ability to read the manners of getting along peaceably with other creatures, the feelings of loyalty to your own friends—there are hundreds of such things involved in any situations you happen to think about. When *upper-world* babies are born they don't know about these things. They don't even know they're going to have to learn a language. But these baby horse-fish come into the world with a fair knowledge of English."

BILL frowned darkly. He felt a twinge of something like jealousy or hatred.

After what he'd seen he couldn't doubt these weird facts. But he didn't welcome them. To think that these silent, cruel little water beasts could snap up men's thought waves with no effort—at no cost—*for no good!*

"Why haven't the spiny-men wiped them out?" he asked. "I can't see a thing good about them. They're more treacherous than poison snakes—"

"And friendlier than any human beings, and more helpful—*after* they've absorbed the right thought-waves," said Bea. "These thought-wave phones all through the cavern help keep them friendly. And still, they and the spiny-men are forever clashing."

Her eyelids closed. Her voice trailed away.

"You've got to have some food and rest before we can chance a dash out of this place," Bill whispered. "We've got to pick the right moment—"

"As if it mattered," she breathed. "We'll never get past them."

He had carried her along a perilous shelf of rock high above the river. There were no foot tracks up here. The beams from the nearest wall lights rarely reached up to this level.

"I used to climb this trail when I was a little girl," Bea said. "I would come up here and spy on both cities. I saw so much trouble between the two sides of the river that I grew to hate it all."

"We'll soon be out of here—for good," said Bill. "Here's a shadowed spot. You've got to lie down and rest before we go on."

"Bill, we'll never make it," she

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sobbed quietly, lying down on the warm rock and folding her arm under her head for a pillow. "There's not a chance in a thousand that the horse-fish will let us live, after what's happened. You see, that's why they took me off the boat in the first place—to care for those eggs."

Bill sat down near her, folded his arms.

"Did they know it was you—a native?" he asked.

"Not at first. They'd simply swum out to capture any upper-world female."

"Then they go in for kidnapping as a regular sport," Bill muttered.

"They only steal a new upper-world person when they have a need. Usually their captive mothers don't live many years. Sometimes only a few months."

"Bea! You knew this . . . and yet you submitted—"

"They recognized me as soon as I got down here," she looked up at Bill guiltily. "They remembered me as a spiny-girl from across the river. You knew, of course, that I *am*—"

"I guessed," said Bill quietly, avoiding her eyes.

"They recognized me," she went on, "as a native who had been away for a few years. So I confided in them—and made a bargain."

"Yes?"

"I admitted I was a runaway. I couldn't endure living down here. But if they would promise me my freedom afterward, and *yours*, I would go ahead and be the 'thought-mother' to this one batch of eggs. In a few days it would have been over."

Bill understood. At first he was not clear as to why the horse-fish had followed their theft of Bea with a similar kidnapping of Windy Muff. But Beatrice explained that that, too, was customary. The horse-fish always tried to furnish their captured females with mates. In this case, Bill understood, they had failed to pull Maribeau the scientist overboard, but had succeeded in getting Windy Muff.

Bill shuddered as he turned these bizarre customs over in his mind. But practical considerations shook him into action.

"I know where I can get some food," he said, "without being seen . . . And if there's a chance to listen in at a phone—"

"Just food," said Beatrice. "You won't want to hear what they're saying by now."

CHAPTER XII

BILL backtracked over his old trail to the barred window of his prison cell. He called in a whisper. Windy Muff's voice answered him.

"Darned if I didn't think you were hissin' over the phone," said Windy. "Why don't you come around to the door an' walk in? It's wide open."

"How come?"

"Vinson's been here 'n' gone. He came to turn us loose an' give us a free tour of the city. But he found you gone, an' I told him I wouldn't budge from this spot till you came back."

While Bill entered by the door and gathered up the food Windy had saved for him, the latter poured forth the exciting news as fast as he could jabber.

Vin's eyes had blazed cold fire, Windy said, to learn that Bill had broken out and gone to find Bea. Vin had said it was a deadly thing to do, and bad judgment.

"So you told him everything," said Bill heatedly.

"Yep. I've always said my reputation for bein' a liar wasn't deserved. Well, he went on his way, sayin' we should both report to him as soon as

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possible."

"Go and report to him," said Bill sharply. "But tell him not to look for me."

Bill started off, but Windy blocked his path at the door. "Vin was right, was he? You ran into trouble?"

"Plenty of it," Bill admitted. In a few words he related what had happened at the west end of the sea cavern. He concluded by stating his doubts whether Yellow Z was still a friend, after what he'd done. "Anyway, they'll be after me—and Bea too—and she's got to pick up a bit of strength before we can make a break for the top. . . . So long, Windy."

"Good luck, Bill."

Back along the shadowed wall trail Bill sprinted. By now the protective shadows were familiar. In a few moments he was crawling the high narrow ridge that arched above the river out of reach of the lights.

Bea was not sleeping, he had hoped. She had crawled several yards beyond the sheltered spot where he had left her. She was crowding close to the overhanging edge, listening.

Her eyes flicked at Bill as he approached, inviting him to come join her. She was listening to the clattering voices rising from the excited spiny-man city.

"The tension's drum-head tight already, Bill," she whispered. "They're stirred up on both sides of the river. And have you seen the ascent?"

SHE pointed to the zig-zag trail to the upper-world. Bill could see groups of spiny-men stationed near the top. Still further up was a cluster of horse-fish.

"We're not going to get out, Bill. They'll see to that."

"By this time they all know what happened to the eggs, I suppose?"

"Yes. Yellow Z and some others dragged the cylinder back into the horse-fish city only a few minutes ago."

"How'd the horse-fish take it?"

"It's a good thing they can't cry out loud," said Bea. "Look. Those columns swimming in figures and circles at the west side of the river are expressing their anguish and grief."

"Some are crossing the river," Bill observed.

"And there have been minor fights with spiny-men. It's times like these that bring up all old animosities. All my life down here I've watched it. These two cities live forever on the verge of war."

Bea ate and slept while Bill kept vigil.

Toward night a great mass meeting came together on the east bank of the river. It was formally opened by the ruler of the spiny-men himself. Bea gasped to see the aged, sharp backed old creature totter down the path from the triple-domed mud palace.

"That's a rare sight," Bea said. "They don't see him except on the most important occasions."

"What are they going to do?"

"I don't know. I never saw the horse-fish and spiny-men mass together before."

"Do the horse-fish have a king too?"

Bea shook her head. That was one great reason for the constant trouble with the green sea-creatures. They weren't emotionally stable. One of their number might be in favor as a leader for a time—but if he chanced to stab his spine into the back of a spiny-man—or a native islander of the upper-world—he'd absorb a new temperament.

"You can't have rulers or followers among folks that are always changing their natures," Bea said. "So there's just the one king—that old white-

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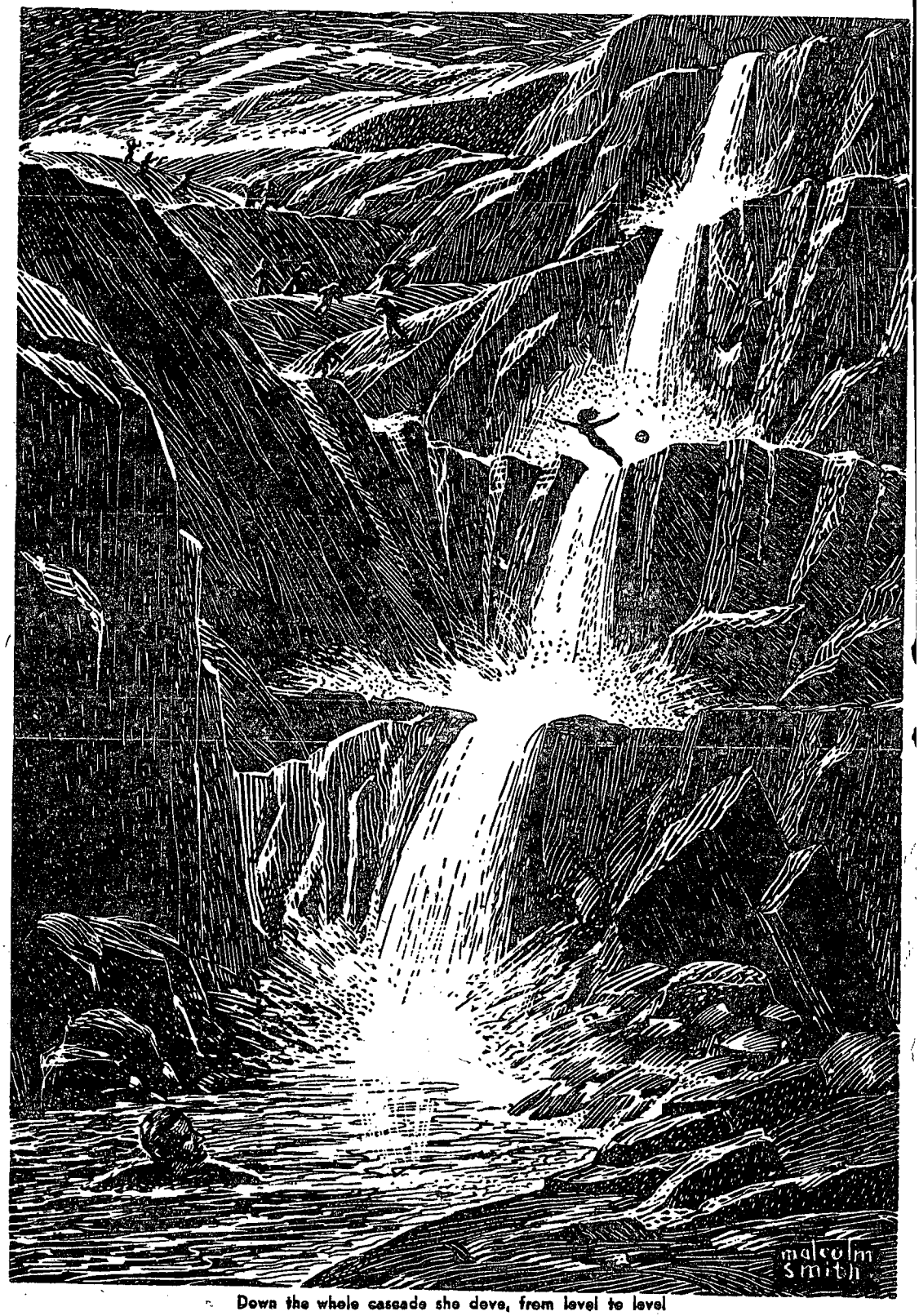

Down the whole cascade she dove, from level to level

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haired spiny-man."

Bill listened. In a quaking voice that spoke the tongue of an aged English sea captain the spiny-man king called the mass meeting to order. The hundreds of horse-fish, ranged along the river's edge, were listening attentively. Closer around the mud dais were the clusters of spiny-men, women, and children.

The king, thought Bill, was little more than a figure-head. He recited a remarkable legend from memory—a fanciful tale of the shipwreck of centuries ago, and the ravages of a volcano and a tidal wave that left a band of English explorers imprisoned here.

THEN his archaic sing-song recitation hinted that there was an amazing fusion of two kinds of animal life—man and horse-fish—the strange nature of which only the gods might explain. But the ancient English explorers need not be ashamed of that amazing fusion, for nothing less could have won the victory of survival.

This brought the king's recitation down to the present century when the new and wonderful race of spiny-men emerged. It was the triumphant blend of the best qualities of men and horse-fish.

And at last, so the king's story went, trade and commerce had been established with the upper-world, so that sealocks and pumps and electrical miracles had been procured.

Then with a stereotyped promise that the spiny-men were destined to become the great earth-dwelling race of the future, the king bowed low, turned, and tottered back to his tripled-domed mud palace at the foot of the ascent.

Now Thork, the hard-bitten lieutenant, took charge. The real business of the day began.

"No one denies that the horse-fish have their rights," he began, and with his opening gun the spines of the horse-fish began to bristle. "Many's the time the spiny-men have been too liberal with the rights of you horse-fish. You are asking me for examples? Don't be absurd. . . ."

Bill saw the implication. The horse-fish who were wearing the portable telephones *were* asking questions, no doubt. For the phones made their thoughts transport to Thork, who was likewise wearing a phone. As fast as he spoke he was picking up their mental reactions. He came back at them angrily.

"Whenever some upper-world innocent blunders into one of your sacred cylinders, and messes up some eggs just before hatching season, what do *you* do? You horse-fish kill him. And we spiny-men don't raise a hand, because we've got in a habit of pampering you and your rights. . . ."

Bill whispered, "Is that bird getting ready to take our sides?"

Bea doubted it. "I never knew him to champion any outsider," she said, never taking her eyes off the crowd below her.

Thork's challenge continued. "This time it happens you've dragged a spiny-girl *into your egg-training* business. And you've had a disaster. Well, let me warn you. *This* side of the river is waiting to welcome that girl. We've been waiting a long time for her to come back."

Some of the horse-fish were removing their head-phones by this time, and that, Bill knew, meant they didn't want their thoughts to be conveyed.

"In fact," Thork went on, "this spiny-girl is someone *I've* been particularly waiting for, ever since we let her go away to be educated. . . . And if she's within earshot of my voice, I want her to know that *she's* not going to pay

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for the broken eggs. She's our own. There'll be war in camp if you horse-fish make one move to harm a hair of her head!"

THE challenge ended on the harsh note of "Knock a chip off my shoulder if you dare!"

Suddenly the whole riverbank of green seemed to fold in slowly toward the spiny-men. Not with a rush. Just a slow turtle-paced movement. The green bags some were carrying, Bea whispered, contained deadly scorpion-fish, their favorite weapons.

"Stand where you are, horse-fish!" The full-voiced command rang from the throat of George Vinson. He sprang to the dais. "Thork isn't the only voice in this city. Listen to me, horse-fish!"

The wave of slowly advancing horse-fish stopped. The ranks of the spiny-men, bristling for trouble, suddenly quieted. It was plain that the black-haired little mediator was respected by both sides of the underground world. At once he launched a feverish plea for peace and harmony.

The girl was also *his* friend, he said; and so was the man who had broken jail and gone to find her. But there were stouter reasons than these for keeping peace. There was the vision of great destiny which the spiny-men held.

"And this vision, as I have told you so many times," George Vinson pleaded, "*must* have the cooperation of the most highly developed upper-world men *and* the most highly developed horse-fish. The biological contributions of both are indispensable."

Bill gasped, "Biological!" He looked to Bea for an answer.

"That's George Vinson's big idea," she whispered. She drew closer to Bill and answered his questions.

Yes, she had expected to marry an upper-world man—that expectation had been the terror of her childhood. But a mixing of spiny-folk with upper-world folk, she had been taught, was the only way this superior underground race would breed out the damning marks which their crossing with horse-fish had left on them—webbed hands and feet, and a row of more or less conspicuous spines over the backbone. So, as a child Bea had been doomed to marry one of the upper-world guests.

Yes, there were many such guests—perhaps two or three a year. It was George Vinson's difficult task to go to the upper-world and spread the gospel of a finer race and to bring converts back with him. The finest corals and pearls from the nearby seas were spent to make him a wealthy and respected missionary. Many of his converts now lived here; others died through misfortunate dealings with the horse-fish; and some fled.

"You say you *were* to have married an upperworld man?" Bill asked.

"They decreed otherwise as soon as they saw I was becoming a young woman—*without* spines or webs. Then they decided I should go to the upper-world for an education," Bea sighed, "because I would not be conspicuous. When I came back a suitable match would be made for me here."

Bill scowled. "When had you intended coming back?"

"Never," said Bea. "I loved the upper-world. I hated all this—even Vin with his fine theories. That's why I've almost hated myself. Because at heart I know I'm a traitor."

BILL slipped his arm around her, patting her shoulder gently. She was trembling. That, he knew, was what Thork's speech had done for her; for the lieutenant's hint of marriage had had the twang of a threat.

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"I'm going to see that you marry an upper-world man as soon as I can get you out of here." Bill looked down into her clear eyes. He whispered hoarsely, "I don't know about these spiny-men theories. And all this vision business that Vin used to try to pound into my head—it went right over me. But I've got my own vision, Bea. It begins right here, with me telling you I love you—and you telling me the same. . . . Say it, won't you, Bea?"

"You make it sound so easy, Bill," she whispered. Her face lifted slightly toward his. He crushed her lips in the warmth of his kisses.

The speeches continued to well up from somewhere below the ledge, but Bill ceased to hear them. The ocean's high tide began to spill down through the cavern in rhythmic gushes. But Bill was oblivious to roaring waterfalls. He heard nothing but the pounding of Bea's heart, and his own, and the enchanting whispers from the lips he loved to kiss.

"You've got to promise you'll marry me, Bea. If you will, all spiny-men and horse-fish together couldn't keep us down here. . . . Say it, won't you?"

"I do love you, Bill," she breathed. "I can't deny it. . . . But I'll never marry you. Don't look so crushed, Bill. Can't you see—it wouldn't be fair to you—or to our children—because—because I'm a spiny-woman—and you—you belong to the wonderful world up there!"

CHAPTER XIII

VIBRANT words were still ringing from the river's bank below them. Bill, breathing heavily, began to hear them in spite of himself. Dazed and shattered, his attention returned to the weird meeting.

"Have you a chance to become the masters of the world?"

It was the scientist, Jean Maribeau, wrapping the heterogeneous audience into a magic spell. George Vinson had called upon him, as an authority from the outside world, to express the opinions he had formed in his recent hours of observation.

"That's Vin's supreme strategy for keeping peace," Bea said in a low voice, straining at the cliff's edge to catch every word. "Vin must have given this man a curtain lecture. . . nevertheless—"

Bill glanced sharply at her, surprised to see how her interest had quickened. The words of an upper-world scientist might strike a new responsive chord—

"As a *scientist* I say that no creatures ever lived who have a better chance *to inherit the earth* than you spiny-men. . . . I do not overlook the contributions from both of your lines of ancestors. This instantaneous absorption of knowledge—an ability that is being bred into your race through your kinship with the horse-fish—is destined to make the earth's *new* man superior to the old."

Many horse-fish were nodding their agreement, holding their heads proudly.

"In addition," Maribeau went on, "it goes without saying that the vast stores of knowledge from the upper-world men will become your birthright. . . . But I must be brutally frank. There are not enough of you—spiny-men and horse-fish combined—to so much as conquer the island village over your heads.

"What does this mean? It means that *you, the spiny-men, cannot afford to lose one potential father or mother.* If Vin is able to convert upper-world men to this cause, their biological contributions will bend the race toward the ultimate triumph. But let me be frank again, at the risk of being brutal. You

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creatures, you horse-fish—"

THE scientist hesitated, as if catching warnings from the ranks of the speechless green creatures.

"You horse-fish must *not* seek to increase *your* numbers. Your contributions to the spiny-men have been made. Your flashy intellect has taken root among them. They now have the handicaps of partial spines and webs. *But they must not have the handicap of speechlessness. That would be fatal to their progress.* So—"

Horse-fish began to hoist their heads belligerently.

"So—you sea creatures who have no tongues—and that goes for every pure-bred horse-fish I've observed—you should cease to reproduce! I advise you to destroy your own eggs, and to commit racial suicide!"

The horse-fish rose up on their hind legs. Dozens of them waved their arms. Some reached into their green bags and seized their deadly scorpion-fish. Still, something held them back. To Bill it seemed that a single battle-cry would have galvanized them into an army plunging forward to attack. But without that battle-cry they were only so many separate clusters of individuals.

Yet their bluff forced the speaker to a quick conclusion. He ended by reminding them of the immortality that awaited all of them if they could inherit the earth. Evolution, he said, was *sympodial*. It left many races out on a dead limb. But now it could become a conscious process, an instrument in their own hands. And the present upper-world man would pass out of existence because it had become over-specialized.

"Don't forget that human life came forth from the sea," Maribeau shouted, swinging his fists dramatically. "If a new man evolves, he must receive his fresh impetus from that cradle of all life—the sea."

These words were almost more than Bill could digest. It was hard to believe that the horse-fish could catch their significance so readily. But along with their alertness, their emotions were up and down like a thermometer. One moment they were enraged to be told they should commit race suicide. The next they were inflated by thoughts of their wonderful contributions to their descendants.

Once more they had stopped in their tracks, the whole body of nervous horse-fish, listening, considering.

"Gad, what a narrow one," Bill whispered to Bea. "He's got 'em coming his way again. If they can take it, it puts them and the spiny-men back on an even keel."

Bea, her eyes intent upon the scene below, made a surprising answer. "*I* can take it. . . . For the first time I'm getting a glimmer of the big, wonderful thing Vin's been preaching all these years. . . . Do you suppose—"

"*What,* Bea?"

"Do you suppose it would work? . . . Have I been blind?" She was rising slowly, as if in a dream, and the light from below showed an almost fanatical fervor coming into her mysterious eyes. "Would I get rid of this guilty traitor feeling if I'd see it his way?"

"*Who's* way?"

"Vin's. If I'd do what he wants me to do—marry him—cast my lot with him and the rest of my people—"

BILL nodded slowly. A new understanding was soaking into his dizzy brain. Vin . . . his friend . . . the swellest guy that ever lived. . . .

"So that—that's it, is it, Bea?" All the spirit was gone out of Bill.

"I believe that's it—"

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Bill's arm reached impulsively, tried to draw her back into the shadows. "Wait. Don't you want to think it over?"

"I'm going to dive down to the river, Bill, and swim over to them, tell them I've come to stay. They need me. Vin *deserves—*"

"No, Bea!" Bill leaped up. "For God's sake, not in that spirit!"

She ran along the edge of the ledge, stopped directly above the center of the river. For an instant she was the statue of the perfect woman, poised to dive.

But the sharp voice of Thork rang through the air. The meeting took a weird turn back to violence. In one brief, harsh pronouncement the ugly lieutenant threw overboard all of Vin's and the scientist's hard-won gains.

"I repeat, you horse-fish still have your rights. We'll leave the girl out of this, because she's a spiny-girl. And I'll swear to her innocence. But you are entitled *to a life* in exchange for those broken eggs."

The horse-fish waved their webbed hands like banners.

"Yes," Thork shouted, *"I maintain you are entitled to kill the upper-world man who committed the crime!"*

Bill caught only half a glimpse of the pandemonium. He saw George Vinson try to reach the speaker's platform. Windy Muff was helping him. And the scientist, like the other two, was shouting to the green sea-creatures to hold their places and listen.

But Vin and his party were hurled back by a gang of horse-fish waving poison scorpion-fish in their faces. Bull's-Eye, the friend of the lieutenant, was leading the gang.

At the same moment other groups of horse-fish started chasing off in a dozen different directions.

The spiny-men themselves jumped on the bandwagon that Thork had set in motion. Their shouts filled the air. "Bring him in!" "What can we lose!" "The horse-fish still have *some rights!*" "Anything to keep peace!" "Bring him in!"

Bill caught his breath. Like arms of an explosion these creatures were shooting out in all directions. The frenzy of violence was on them. They were after him.

At that instant Bea's footsteps pounded past him, her hand swished across his shoulder.

"Follow me, Bill!" she hissed.

Together they bounded over the arched ledge to the eastward. They leaped a narrow gap. Bill had the dizzy sensation of flying over a hundred-foot drop, with bright light glowing up against his silhouetted bare feet and legs.

Bea, only three paces ahead of him, was racing with confidence. She must have remembered these trails from childhood. The toss of her dark tresses showed that she was keeping an eye on the zig-zag trails. They were hardly a quarter of a mile away.

But suddenly she stopped, flinging a hand back at Bill.

The ledge ahead was blocked off. New seepage had cut off the trail since Bea, as a child, had traversed this narrow path.

"Back!" she panted, bounding ahead of him. "Keep in the shadow!"

BUT this time when they leaped over the narrow gap they heard an explosive outcry from somewhere below. The light had caught them.

They ran like wildfire now. It was a race to the west end of the passage. There, Bill remembered, they'd be able to duck through the A-shaped entrance to the dark sea cavern.

But as they chased down the incline

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toward the western end of the narrow ledge, they saw a cluster of webbed hands rise in their pathway. Six or seven horse-fish were scrambling up the narrow arched path carrying their poison weapons.

"Back again!" Bea shouted. And as Bill tried to jerk a stone loose from the frozen wall, she cried, "No! Come on!"

Then he was running at her side, heedless of the light. She gasped between breaths, "The fourth mound on the left, Bill. . . . Can you make it . . . under water? Come on. . . . Stay right with me!"

They glanced back when they reached the point above the center of the river. The horse-fish were hurling their weapons like handgrenades. A poisonous lion-fish rolled in the stone dust near Bill's bare feet, and its orange and black fins stiffened for action.

"Together!" Bea panted.

They dived. On the descent Bill gathered the confusion of sounds into his ears, aware that he was plunging from one danger to another. Gangs of horse-fish would see and rush back to the river. From the distance the slush-slush of the waterfall was growing stronger.

Together they plunged under for the long under-water swim. Bea cut deep, and Bill followed. For two minutes they shot straight up the central channel.

Now their ears caught the plunging of other divers. Bea forced a swifter pace. Then she suddenly plowed along an inclined channel bottom and rose. Bill followed her up through the darkness. He came up into air.

The surrounding blackness of the mud mound was relieved only by a few narrow peepholes of light. Bill caught his breath and followed Bea down again.

For five swift breathless underwater swims the chase went on. Each time they came up in the horse-fish houses for a breath they could see that their pursuers were gaining ground. They could see the panting gills, the blazing little magenta eyes and savage mouths skimming beneath the surface. Here and there they caught glimpses of webbed hands clutching specimens of poisonous sea-life.

In the fifth empty mud hut they entered, Bea choked, "It's over!"

BILL heard a rush of water in the black entrance through which they had risen. The horse-fish would catch them this time. There would be no room to dart past a horse-fish in that under-water passage.

But Bill sprang up, struck his husky shoulders against the baked-mud roof. It strained, cracked. The gash of light showed the noses of horse-fish scrambling up out of the inky liquid. Bill crashed the roof again and it crumbled in a mass of debris. But he and Bea were out and on the run.

"Quick headwork!" Bea's smile flashed at him from her dirt-smeared face. It was a grim smile, aware of the nearness of death, but there was courage in it.

In the mad foot-race that followed, Bill and Bea gained over the horse-fish. They rounded the upper end of the merged cities, leaping inlets, dodging pools of imprisoned scorpion fish, passing small parties of creatures that were neither horse-fish nor spiny-men but something of both.

At nearly every turn a new surprise party was awaiting them. Horse-fish were trying to close in from all directions.

But not spiny-men. Somehow their explosive violence had become disorganized and they were doing more

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shouting than chasing. Bill understood. They were willing to catch him; but their discovery that their own Bea-Bea was helping him race to freedom had thrown them into confusion.

Now Bea ran straight over the triple domes of the king's mud palace and jumped to the edge of the zig-zagging ascent. Bill felt the mud roof break under his feet and he bounded after her. Then they were running side-by-side up the trail. Somewhere high above there was a patch of open sky. But nearer at hand there were parties of guards from both cities.

Two hundred feet up they came to a dead stop. A semicircle of hardened guardsmen with strong human faces, slightly webbed hands, and spiny bare backs bobbed up out of the stone-wall barrier, marched forth to cut off the trail from both directions.

The leader of the guards stepped over to a pink globe and inserted his head in the phone. Then he emerged and barked his orders.

"Thork says we're to hold Bea-Bea. As for the man, we're to let the horse-fish guards have their own way with him." The leader whistled a signal and twenty horse-fish, stationed a little farther up the trail, came bounding down over the rocks swinging loops of sea-weed rope.

CHAPTER XIV

BILL and Bea stood on the point of a hairpin turn, watching the semicircle of guards close their ranks. An opening was left for the horse-fish to gallop through, like a band of weird cowpunchers on a rampage.

"Stay with me!"

Once again Bea's courageous whisper gave Bill his cue. Bea sprang over the edge of the trail and caught herself on a ledge twenty feet below. Then she was off again, on what seemed to be an uncharted road to sudden death. Bill followed on her heels.

He followed without looking back, though the sea-weed ropes were swishing right back of him. Once a loop caught on his forehead and he barely ducked in time. If it had settled over his neck he'd have gone tumbling down the steep rocky wall, perhaps to hang himself.

This was no marked trail. Bea was fighting to catch the least perilous handholds. In places the wall was like the face of a skyscraper.

But every step brought them nearer to the bounding two-hundred foot waterfall. And now Bill guessed her strategy.

"It's our old dive, Bill!" Her eyes flashed at him. "This is where I learned it. Four swift death-leaps in succession."

Bill felt the spray of water on his bare chest and legs. Then he felt the snap of rope over his arm. The loop suddenly tightened on his wrist.

He had an instant's glimpse of the three horse-fish jerking the other end of the rope. They must have been mad to take such chances, standing on a four foot shelf.

As they jerked, Bill dropped into the big rock basin where the vast fall of water was roaring in and out. One hand found a hold. The other was tending the rope. It gave, and he saw the three horse-fish fly out into space. Two of them slipped off and fell down—down—

No one would hear them crush to pulp. The roar of the falls would drown that sound. But the hosts of creatures below would see. Their little faces were staring up—

Jerk! The weight of the third horse-fish couldn't have pulled the rope *that* hard. Bill struggled to free his wrist.

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Momentarily he released his handhold.

"Careful, Bill!" Bea screamed. The horse-fish that had held on had swung, pendulum style, to wedge himself safely in a crevice. There he applied the leverage of his arms to the rope, *and pulled Bill over.*

Bill saw too late. He skidded over the slippery edge of the basin and shot down with the fall.

ON the descent he barely succeeded in freeing himself of the rope. He straightened out with the falling water, fought toward what appeared to be the deepest point of the approaching pool. He struck it for a shallow dive—and was off again for the next waterfall descent.

Then another—and a fourth.

And before he had had time to catch his breath he was looking up from the boiling surface of the river to see Beatrice, with all her grace and beauty, plunge down the same succession of falls.

She bobbed up beside him. They looked back at the mountainous wall where several horse-fish guards were perched. The little green figures showed no inclination to duplicate the series of dives. Then Bill and Bea turned to face the hosts of spiny-men on the riverbank. *The crowds were cheering. . . .*

"That's for you," Bill said. "Why don't you go back to them and stay clear of my fate?"

"Because I want to share your fate, Bill," Bea swam close to him, reached out to grip his hand. "I knew as soon as they started after you that I was wrong—about trying to stay here and be loyal, I mean. I'd rather die with you—"

The clamoring voices from the riverbank were demanding that they come. And though it was puzzling, the voices carried no tone of menace. The shouts were welcoming them, hailing them for their valiant escape, heaping honors upon them.

Bill and Bea obeyed. But it was several minutes before they could understand the strange turn of events. They were made to sit down on comfortable mats and relax. And Bill found it impossible to relax with throngs of spiny-men and horse-fish crowding around.

At first everyone talked at once, but soon the talking was left to Vin, with interpolations from Windy Muff.

"I started it," Windy said. "I figured it was time for me to do a little lyin' to get you outa trouble. So I told the bunch that you wasn't the one that busted into the eggs. It was Thork. I said I'd seen him with my own eyes, an' you only went in afterwards to make sure he hadn't got up in the top of the cylinder to bother Bea."

"And as we soon discovered," said Vinson, "Windy's guess was right. Yellow-Z discovered Thork's foot-tracks in the egg-compartment. There was nothing for Thork to do but admit it."

"What happened to Thork?" Bill asked anxiously, catching the flicker of worry in Bea's eyes.

"We fought," said Vin. "We've always been enemies—and rivals. When he found himself caught, he turned on me. Bull's-Eye tried to help him, but it was a mistake, because Yellow-Z jumped in on my side."

Vinson paused to glance at the bruised fist of his webbed left hand.

"That's when you popped him," said Windy.

"Yes, I gave it to Thork and he took an unfortunate spill."

"Unfortunate?" said Bea.

"He fell," said Vin, "against the scorpion fish that Bull's-Eye was try-

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ing to use on me. It got him. I think he'll die before morning, in spite of the care they're giving him."

THERE was a cool silence. Bill wondered what the horse-fish were thinking, after all the trouble Thork had made for them, and after all he had pretended to be the champion of their rights.

"That ain't all," said Windy. "Here comes Yellow-Z and the king now."

While the aged white-haired old spiny-man approached, the throngs rose and waited respectfully.

"You got a surprise comin', Bea," Windy whispered. "You see, when Thork fell an' Bull's-Eye was crouchin' in the way, darned if the horse-fish's stabbers didn't stick the old boy right along the backbone."

"We saw it happen," said Vin, "and it gave us an idea: If Thork's inner sentiments were transferred to Bull's-Eye, we could put the horse-fish into a thought-phone and pick up Thork's dying thoughts. So we did."

"An' guess what—"

But the king was entering the circle now, and everyone was silent. Maribeau, the scientist, crowded close to miss no detail of this impromptu ceremony. Windy's eyes ran rings around the breathless audience. Bea's shoulder trembled against Bill's arm.

"I have been asked to approve the revelation," said the king in a low rumbling voice, "which one of the horse-fish has made of Thork's dying sentiments. Those sentiments, as quoted to me are, 'They mustn't know that Bea-Bea is *not* a spiny-girl. They mustn't know that I stole her from an English family visiting above—' "

"Did Thork say that?" Bea fairly floated to her feet in astonishment.

"That, as caught by Bull's-Eye," said the king, "was Thork's secret thought immediately after the mortal wound struck him. And I must add—"

Bill could hear Bea's heart pounding.

". . . that the lieutenant confided this secret to me many years ago," the king said calmly. "It happened after the drowning of one of our babies . . . so I assure you, Bea, that you are not—a spiny-girl."

Bea reeled, nearly fainting, as Bill helped her gently to her seat. The strangest of fires lighted her eyes, and with burning amazement she looked from Bill to Vin and back to Bill. A curious smile touched the corners of her lips, as if she were laughing inside.

"But perhaps," the king added, after he had turned to go, "we should insist that you *are* a spiny-girl, since we've raised you. That, however, I shall leave with our mediator and new lieutenant, Vin-Vin."

The white haired king hobbled away.

Vin turned to Bea and Bill, smiling. "Friends, my yacht and sailors are up there—at your service. Will you come back sometime?"

"Will we!" Bill said it enthusiastically. Then he turned to Bea. "Will we?"

"We'll think it over, Vin," Bea smiled. "After all that you and the scientist have told us, we may want to come—to live—for the benefit of our descendants."

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YOU'D think nothing would be simpler than closing a bank and giving the money on deposit back to the depositors. Yet John M. (100%) Nichols, head of the First National Bank of Englewood, is having all kinds of trouble finding the owners of the $32,000 which is left in his bank. Still Mr. Nichols has done all right. With almost superhuman effort he has managed to give back some $6,868,000. After twenty years of banking, Nichols moans: "It's more difficult to liquidate a bank than to run one."

Archer Watson Wellington.

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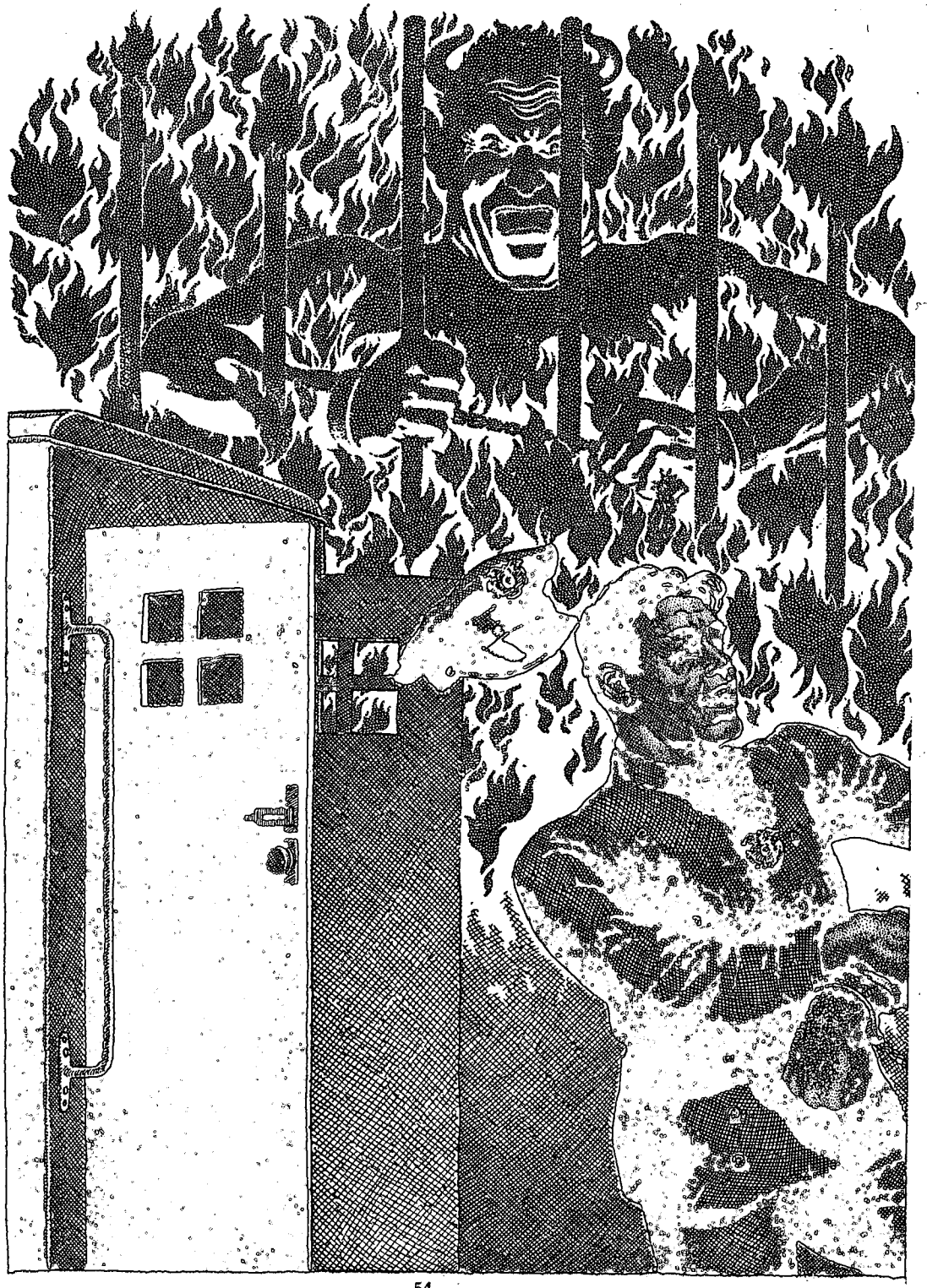
CRIME - CLEAN - UP



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IN CENTER CITY

by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

THE mayor of Center City was a kind and humane man, always thoughtful and always soft-spoken. So when he spoke to the chief of police about the crime wave that had broken over this city of churches, his voice could not be heard beyond the walls of his sound-proofed office.

"Listen, you big tub of lard," his honor, the mayor, said. "I want you to get off your can and do something about this crime wave that the papers are hollering about. I don't want any excuses, see? I want something done and you . . . well better do it. I got an election coming up. You get it?"

"Yes sir," the chief of police said. "I understand, sir."

THESE two coppers knew they had a big-shot in custody. Now Center City would be rid of its crime ring . . But when their prisoner identified himself, he became a white elephant indeed!

"Into the wagon with you! We got you dead to rights!"

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"You damn well better understand," the mayor said. "Or there will be a new chief of police in this town. And I ain't fooling!"

The chief of police was also a kind and humane man. He took his departure from the office of the mayor and returned to headquarters, where he called his captains before him and spoke as follows:

"Boys, I have been talking to the mayor and he tells me the newspapers are saying this town is a hot-bed of vice, sin, and crime. Of course I know that none of you read anything in the papers except the pictures, so this is news to you. Now I hate to ask you to soil your lily-white hands with anything as crude as work, but I do want to slip you a tip—if Center City ain't cleaned up by this time tomorrow night, there is going to be some police captains pounding beats in this town, and I don't mean anybody else but you. Boys," the chief said, "have I made myself clear?"

He had made himself clear. The captains went to speak to the sergeants. Now it is not necessary, for the purposes of this narrative, to report what all the captains said to all the sergeants. It is not even necessary to reveal what Captain Gallagher, of the plainclothes division, said to Sergeant G. B. (Give 'em the Boot) Buck. It is enough just to mention that Captain Gallagher spoke to Sergeant Buck.

Under normal circumstances, Sergeant Buck was not an unkind man. He did not bite the ears off every drunk that got thrown in the lock up. And there were times when his own men, every one of them ex boy scouts who had won all their merit badges, could enter his office charged with some trifling offense, such as helping themselves to an apple from the cart of a huckster, and emerge without a single permanent mark on their bodies.

Two of the men who worked for Sergeant Buck were Plainclothesmen Grady and Waller. Both of them were kindly men who loved their superior officer and in turn were loved by him. Of the conference between the mayor and the chief, they knew nothing. Nor did they know that the chief had conferred with his captains and the captains in turn had conferred with the sergeants. They knew, of course, that a sudden and mysterious crime wave had broken over Center City, but it was none of their affair. It was Saturday night and they were off duty. Crime could wait. They were in the locker room of police headquarters and their attention was fully occupied by something far more important than crime.

"Here's how," said Grady.

"Mud in your eye," Waller stated firmly.

"Down the hatch," Grady said again.

"Here's to the mayor," Waller said.

"Here's to the chief," Grady echoed.

AT THIS point they stopped for breath. The bottle, a gift from a kindly saloon keeper on Sixth Street who sometimes stayed open after hours, had been full when they started. It was no longer full.

"Here's to Sergeant Buck," Waller said, starting again.

"May he fall down a well and break his blasted neck!" Grady fervently echoed.

"Thank you, men, for your kind wishes," a voice said from the doorway.

To say that the two officers jumped half out of their skins would be to understate the situation. They leaped. Grady, with a sinuous motion that would have interested a professional contortionist, tried to get the bottle under his coat. It was against the rules to drink at headquarters. According to Scoutmaster Buck, it was against the

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rules to drink anywhere. And it was Buck who had spoken to them from the doorway. Too often had they heard the kindly sergeant speak in nightmares for them ever to mistake his voice.

"Oh, hell!" Grady gasped. "Here's where we catch it."

Grady stood a flat six feet in his bare feet and weighed a good two hundred pounds. Waller was an inch shorter and ten pounds heavier. The coach of any professional football team would have welcomed them with open arms. When Sergeant Buck appeared in the doorway each turned a sickly white.

"Ah," said Buck, advancing into the room. "Drinking, I see."

"Y—yes sir," said Grady.

"N—no sir," Waller denied.

Buck smiled fondly at Waller.

"I—mean yes sir," Waller hastily corrected himself.

Buck gazed fondly at both of them. "Ah, well," he said. "After all, it's Saturday night."

"Huh?" said Grady.

"I said it's Saturday night," Buck patiently repeated.

"What's that got to do with it?" Waller asked.

"I am aware that on Saturday night some of my men wish to celebrate," Buck explained. "You were afraid I was going to be harsh with you for violating regulations by drinking at headquarters, weren't you?"

Waller nodded.

"Well, I'm not," Buck said.

"You're not—" Waller choked. He looked at Grady but got no comfort from that source. Grady was standing stiffly at attention. He had succeeded in getting the bottle under his coat, all but the neck, which was sticking straight up.

"Not at all," Buck continued. "I am not even going to mention the matter, *especially since you men have volunteered for extra duty tonight.*"

Buck's voice had exactly the same patient tone of a scoutmaster saying, "Men, it is wrong to pull the tails off tadpoles. Good scouts do not do that."

GRADY came to life. "Hey!" he yelped.

"I ain't volunteered," Waller shouted.

"We're off duty, Sarge," Grady protested.

"You mean you *were* off duty," Buck corrected. He cleared his throat. "For your information, I will reveal some facts that may have escaped your attention. First, there is a crime wave in this fair city. Honest citizens are getting their pockets picked. Ladies walking along the street are having their purses snatched. Banks are getting held up. Also," Buck said, "new gambling joints are springing up like mushrooms. The school children are playing slot machines and pin ball games, which are to be found in every service station and confectionery—"

"I ain't seen any slots," Grady protested.

"If you will look in the newspapers, you will see plenty of them," Buck said. "The papers say that some underworld big shot has moved in on Center City."

"Who is he?" Waller asked.

"That," said Buck, "is another thing the newspapers are asking. They asked the mayor, in a front page editorial. The mayor didn't know. But he does know he's got an election coming up, so he asked the chief of police. The chief don't know, either, so he asked Captain Gallagher. The captain came down and asked me if I knew who this big shot that has caused this crime wave was. When I said I didn't know, the captain said maybe I had better find out. So—" Buck's voice took on a slightly acid tone, "the minute I saw

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you two boys having a drink, I knew you were going to volunteer for special duty tonight to solve this crime wave. And now," the sergeant finished, "do I hear you volunteering or do I hear myself slapping a fifty dollar fine on each of you, for drinking at headquarters?"

The sergeant smiled. It was within his power to fine the men under him for infractions of regulations. He would not hesitate to exercise that power.

"Look, Sarge—" Grady wailed.

"We're off duty," Waller protested. "We been on our feet all day and my dogs are killing me. You're not going to send us out, are you?"

"In the first place," Buck corrected, "I'm not sending you out. You are volunteering. And in the second place, the mayor wants this crime wave solved, the chief wants it solved, the captain wants it solved. And so do I. Does that mean anything to you?"

It meant something all right. It meant that two plainclothes detectives might suddenly move from a cushy spot at headquarters back to a beat. It meant that the same thing might happen to any number of sergeants, several captains, the chief himself. It meant the mayor might no longer find himself in a position to negotiate contracts for public buildings, paving, et cetera. Detective Waller was silent. He plainly perceived the situation.

Not so Grady. He was rebellious. "This is my night off," he announced. "I am not going to volunteer."

Sergeant Buck perceived that he was being defied. He didn't mind. He knew how to handle mutiny. "Seventy-five dollars," he said.

"Seventy-five! Huh?" Grady gulped.

"For drinking at headquarters," Buck explained.

"I volunteer!" said Waller hastily. Grady began to sweat. He knew the sergeant would enforce that fine. But he was still mutinous. "I'm not going," he announced. "I don't have to. You can't force a man to accept duty without his consent."

According to regulations, Grady was quite right.

"One hundred dollars," said Buck, like an auctioneer selling an extra fine batch of tobacco. "The regulations empower me to assess any fine I see fit."

Grady's lips began to work. But no sound came forth. Buck, however, could hear what hadn't been said aloud.

"An additional twenty-five dollars," he said. "For swearing at your superior officer."

"All right!" Grady screamed. "I volunteer."

CHAPTER II

The Big Round-up

THUS began what was to go down in the history of crime as "The Big Round-up at Center City." The scene between Sergeant Buck and Plainclothesmen Grady and Waller was repeated in other places at headquarters as various other sergeants, inspired by the kindly words of their captains, went down to reason with their men. The men, detectives, uniformed patrolmen, the rackets squad, the vice squads, the bunco detail, the arson squad, even the laboratory force, after listening to the cheering, patriotic words spoken by their fatherly sergeants, went forth into the night resolved to do or die for dear old Center City. They were also resolved to kick the teeth out of every crook they could catch.

Of course the crook they wanted most to catch was that mysterious and elusive big shot who, moving in on Center City a month or so previously, had brought about this carnival of crime about which the newspapers were so eloquently talking. His teeth they wanted

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to kick down his throat, and then kick back out again. But not knowing his identity, they could only throw out a general dragnet in the hope of catching him. If they failed to land the big fish they really wanted, they would certainly land a horde of smaller fry, and by persuasion and reason the small fry could no doubt be induced to leave town. Thus Center City would again become a fit place to rear children.

"We'll get him," the chief reported to the mayor. "All the boys have agreed to cooperate. By midnight we'll have every jack-leg crook run out of this town, or my name ain't McCarthy."

The mayor, relying on this promise, made a statement to the press. "I want to extend an invitation to every citizen and voter to be present at police headquarters tonight and see for yourselves the efficiency with which our noble boys in blue clean up this town. The chief of police joins with me in this invitation. We make you this promise: that from tonight on, Center City will be clean of crime."

The press received this statement with great reserve, but, of course, printed it. The radio stations put it on the air. The public, or as many of them as could crowd into police headquarters, took advantage of the mayor's invitation, so that by nine o'clock the police station was crowded with a waiting throng, eager to see the animals.

The animals began to arrive.

They came singing. The words were different in each song but the tune was the same. "You can't do this to me. I got protection. Wait until the Big Shot hears about this."

The panhandlers sang this song, the confidence men sang it, as did the disturbed girls from the red light district, who added the information that they were ladies.

"You better get this Big Shot," the mayor said grimly to the chief.

"We'll get him," the chief promised. "I'll issue an order to pick up every suspicious character in town."

THE order came to Grady and Waller, via radiotelephone, as they sat morosely in a squad car on Sixth Street.

"We better make an arrest," said Grady.

"Don't I know it?" Waller said gloomily. "But where are we going to find anybody to arrest? The boys have been over this whole town with a fine tooth comb. I ain't even seen a panhandler in the last couple of hours."

"It don't make no difference," Grady said. "We got to drag somebody in. From all that noise up at headquarters, everybody on the force must have caught at least one crook. We got to catch somebody. Buck'll have our hide if we don't."

"You show me a crook and I'll catch him."

"All right," said Grady, pointing. "There he is."

A mild, inoffensive-appearing little man was coming down the street. As he neared the squad car he paused and looked in the window of a pawn shop.

"He don't look like a crook to me," Waller said doubtfully.

"What difference does that make?" Grady said sarcastically. "He's looking in that pawn shop window, ain't he? That makes him a suspicious character, don't it? Maybe he's going to throw a rock through that window and grab something and run, for all we know. You talk like an old maid. Come on."

The two detectives piled out of the squad car. The little man saw them coming. He took one look and shied like a frightened horse.

"Help!" he bleated.

"He's trying to run!" Grady shouted. "Don't let him draw that gun. He's

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dangerous. Don't give him a chance to—"

If the little man was trying to draw a gun he must have been planning to pluck it from the empty air. Both hands were in plain sight. But, for all Grady knew, maybe this little man was a magician and could indeed pull a gun out of nothing but air. The big cop grabbed at him.

"Get away from me, you big bums," the little man shouted, shoving Grady.

"Hah!" Grady said gratefully. "Resisting an officer. All right, bub, you asked for it."

Whether or not this suspicious character had asked for it, he got it. Grady's open palm smashed into the middle of his face. As he staggered backward, Waller, who had run around behind, tripped him.

"Work him over," Grady panted. "We'll show him to respect the law in this town."

Under normal circumstances, the two officers would have dealt more gently with a captive, in accordance with the boy scout code. But after their interview with Sergeant Buck, they had forgotten all about the boy scout maxims, "Kindness Pays," and "Look Before You Leap," Grady especially.

THE result was that fifteen minutes later a squad car with siren screaming pulled up in front of police headquarters. From it descended Grady and Waller, smiling broadly. The watching throng cheered them as they escorted their battered and somewhat dazed captive up the steps. Flashlight bulbs popped as the press recorded the scene for posterity.

The prisoner sang the same tune all the others had sung.

"You ruffians! You can't do this to me. I have influence in this community."

"Book him for loitering," Grady told the desk sergeant. "Also for attempted robbery. He tried to break a pawnshop window. Also you can put the bite on him for resisting an officer."

Sergeant Buck put in an appearance, tagged by the chief and the mayor. "Good work, huh, Sarge?" Grady said. "We caught a dangerous character here. Better have him printed and mugged. He looks like he's got a record to me. Maybe we can have the rest of the night off, huh, Sarge?" he finished.

Sergeant Buck started to say something but the words caught in his throat. A deadly pallor crept across his face.

"What's the matter, Sarge?" Grady asked. "Ain't you feeling well?"

"No," Sergeant Buck whispered. "No. I'm not."

"That's too bad," Grady said sympathetically. "Maybe you better take the rest of the night off too?" How about it, Chief?" he said, turning to the head of the police department. "The Sarge is sick. Maybe we all better knock off now—"

It was at this moment that Grady perceived that the strange malady that had afflicted Sergeant Buck had also spread to the chief of police. The chief looked like he had taken a big bite into what appeared to be a very sound apple, and to his shocked surprise had encountered a worm. The chief looked sick, and the mayor looked sicker.

A strange silence had fallen in the room. Even the press, normally vociferous, was silent. Grady saw the faces of the reporters. They looked dazed, slightly bewildered.

"What's the matter?" Grady said. "What's wrong?"

It was the mayor who stepped forward to make a brief formal statement. "You ignorant fools," the mayor said. "I'll tell you what's the matter. That man you have arrested is my brother."

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FOR an instant the stunned silence continued. Then it was broken as press, whooping with joy, made a dash to the telephones, where they could be heard shouting headlines to happy rewrite men on the other end of the wire.

MAYOR'S BROTHER ARRESTED AS COMMON THIEF

Two detectives, investigating a suspicious character loitering on Sixth Street tonight, caught the brother of the mayor in the act of breaking a pawnshop window. He resisted arrest, but after a short struggle was subdued and brought to police headquarters, where he was booked on charges of loitering, attempted theft, and resisting an officer in the discharge of his duties.

So much the press reported in the column devoted to news. In the editorial department, however, pessimists who had written for years about sin and crime in the city, with no visible results, let themselves go in freer vein.

The long suspected connection between the present administration and the crive wave afflicting our fair city was brought to light tonight by the arrest of the brother of the mayor on charges of theft. Thus, it is obvious that the mayor, instead of trying to free our city from the crime so common here, is in reality harboring and protecting the criminals, It is also obvious that all right-thinking citizens, with this evidence before their eyes, will know how to mark their ballots in the coming election.

On the back steps of police headquarters that night a conference took place. It was short and to the point.

"How was we to know this guy was the mayor's brother?" Grady protested.

"Yeah, how was we to know?" Waller added.

"How do I know the names of two guys who will be in the breadline by this time tomorrow night?" Sergeant Buck said bitterly. "You two miserable misbegotten ——— ——— ——— ——— fool—" The sergeant paused for breath. "Get out of here. You either bring back the big shot who is responsible for this crime wave, or don't come back yourselves. Get goin."

With these kindly words of advice, the sergeant dismissed them. And as they turned to go, he kicked them down the steps.

CHAPTER III

The Captive

THUS it is obvious that all the blame for what happened later cannot justly be laid on Grady and Waller. They were harassed men. But for that matter, the mayor was a harassed man, as was the chief of police, and Sergeant Buck.

At police headquarters, after the identity of his brother was disclosed, and after the press had steadfastly refused to accept any explanation for the incident, the mayor retired to the office of the chief, taking the chief with him. What was said there was never disclosed but when the chief emerged from the conference, it was observed that he had aged remarkably, some said five years, others ten. He was barely able to speak.

"Boys," he said to his assembled men, "you will either catch the big-time crook who is back of this crime wave, or I will break your damned necks."

Thus inspired, his men went forth to battle. Among the criminal element,

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times, already tough, took a quick turn for the worse. It was a bad night for crooks.

Again there was singing at police headquarters. "You can't do this to me. I got protection. Wait until the Big Shot hears about this."

"CROOKS CLAIM PROTECTION," the newspaper headlines said. Every paper in town was holding over its staff and was turning out extras.

"There is no protection of criminals in this city," the mayor announced.

"What about your brother?" a critical reporter asked. "An ex-convict, ain't he? You've been protecting him, ain't you?"

It did the mayor no good to protest that until the moment of his unfortunate arrest, his brother had been a deacon in the church and a Sunday school teacher. "Mayor's brother, ex-convict, once taught Sunday school," the headlines said.

An hour passed. Squads were scouring the town, with no results. "Everybody has heard of this big shot but nobody knows who he is," the reports came in.

"Get him," the chief of police said.

ANOTHER hour passed. By this time the harassed officers of the law, driven to desperation, were bringing in honest citizens almost exclusively. The crooks had all been caught, according to the cops. They were arresting everybody that looked as if he might be guilty of *thinking* about committing a crime.

"Big Clean-Up Catches Only Honest Citizens," the newspapers said.

The mayor, mopping his face, retired to the chief's office. "I'm licked," he said. "The public will never forget this." He looked at the chief. The chief turned pale.

"Beginning tomorrow morning," the mayor said. "You will be back pounding a beat." He was going to elaborate on this statement but he was interrupted. From the hallway outside a calm voice said:

"Get on in there, you big lug, before I knock your block off."

Entranced, the mayor and the chief went to the door. Moving between gaping rows of spectators were two detectives—the mayor winced at the sight of them.

"Grady and Waller!" the chief gasped. "But who's that they've arrested?"

"We got him," Grady answered. "The big-time crook that has been causing all this trouble. We got him."

Grady's lips were puffed and his right eye was already turning black. He walked with a slight limp, but seemed otherwise all right. He was very calm.

"Caught him with the goods," Waller supplied. "No doubt about it this time. We got the evidence. He's the big shot all right."

Waller's nose was slightly out of line and he was tenderly caressing the knuckles of his left hand. He was also very calm.

There was silence at headquarters. Everyone was staring at their captive. He was something to stare at. Built on the generous lines of a gorilla, Gargantia would have taken one look at him and run to hide. He must have weighed three hundred pounds, all of which was muscle. Apparently he had no neck, his head sitting squat on his shoulders. His face, while not exactly ugly, would do as a model until an ugly face came along. The bruises on it didn't help its appearance any.

He was clad in a checkerboard suit the alternate squares of which were green and yellow. Obviously the suit had been cut to fit him perfectly, once. It no longer fitted perfectly. One sleeve

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had been torn out of the coat and the buttons had been jerked off the vest.

"HE RESISTED arrest!" Grady explained.

"We caught him just opening up a new gambling joint," Waller added.

"Good work, men, good work," the mayor exulted. He was already visioning headlines. "Mayor's Clean-Up Drive Succeeds."

"Good work, men," the chief said. "Take him up to the desk and book him. We'll see that he is prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

"Get along, you," Grady said. He did not actually strike the prisoner—there were too many witnesses present—but he did contrive to shove him so that the captive lost balance and fell.

"Youse mugs will pay for this!" he snarled from the floor, in a surprising show of spirit from one subject to the tender mercies of the police. "Youse'll be in my book from now on."

Threats frightened neither Grady nor Waller. Men who had faced Sergeant Buck seldom feared anything that walked the earth.

"Get up," said Grady, smartly kicking the prisoner in the rear.

As they led their captive up to the desk, Grady and Waller could see admiration on the faces of the reporters surrounding them. They glowed. Victory had been hard-won, but victory was their's. To them the laurel wreath!

"Name?" the desk sergeant said, glowering at the sullen prisoner.

There was no answer.

"Tell the sergeant your name," Grady said, cuffing him on the side of the head.

This produced results.

"Satan," the prisoner muttered.

"Satan what?" the desk sergeant automatically asked, his pen poised as he prepared to write.

"Just Satan!" the prisoner snarled in a gutteral tone of voice. "Ain't that enough for youse? Just Satan."

For a space of time that must have lasted minutes the desk sergeant held his pen poised in the air while his startled eyes traveled over the captive before him. Then his face began to jerk as he realized the meaning of the words he had heard. "You—you mean—" he quavered.

"Satan!" the prisoner shouted. "I come up here to get this town organized and these two mugs grab me. Satan's my name. *How long is it going to take for you to get it through your thick heads that I'm the devil!*"

Again there was silence at headquarters, complete silence. With an air of utter abstraction the desk sergeant put the point of the pen between his lips to moisten it. Then he put it down. Behind him was a wall with a window in it. He took one final, horrified look at the prisoner before him and leaped straight through the window. He was shouting:

"Great saints in heaven, the boys have brought in the devil himself!"

THE tinkle of falling glass from the broken window had no more than died into silence before the public, which had jammed and crammed the corridors of headquarters, began to make a general exodus. Some people walked to the nearest exit; others ran. Still others, noting with approval the action of the desk sergeant, went through the windows.

The people had come to headquarters to witness a roundup of crooks. They had not known that the leader of these crooks was the devil and they had not expected to see him. They had not seen the devil before, and after one look, they did not want to see him again. Consequently, they left.

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The mayor, after all, was one of the people. He started to leave, but when flashlight bulbs began to pop, he was forced to change his mind. As long as the press stayed, he would have to stay. As long as the mayor stayed, the chief would have to remain, and while the chief was there, the police force would not depart.

It is highly likely that at least two members of the police force would have left headquarters if they had been able to move their legs. But for the space of several seconds Grady and Waller were completely paralyzed and when the paralysis left them and they started to run, it was too late.

"Lock him in a cell," a voice said.

"Huh?" Grady gasped, looking around.

It was Sergeant Buck who had spoken. The sergeant was calmly surveying the situation.

"You—you mean—lock him up?" Grady whispered. "But he's the devil, he's Old Nick himself."

"So I heard," Sergeant Buck answered imperturbably. "Lock him up."

"But—but he's the devil."

"Yes," came the answer. "And I am Sergeant Buck. The chief is watching me and the mayor is watching the chief and the newspapers are watching the mayor. Now do you want to lock him up, or don't you?"

There was only one answer to that question. They locked him up.

CHAPTER IV

The Dilemma

THE press promptly beseiged the cell.

"Are you really the devil?" a reporter demanded.

"Sure I am," the prompt answer came.

The press, true to its traditions of not believing half the things it saw, was incredulous.

"I don't believe it."

"You're faking."

"The devil has hoofs and horns and tail. You don't. Where's your tail, where's your horns? We think you're lying."

The occupant of the cell was not in a good humor anyhow. This accusation enraged him. "So you don't believe I'm the devil, huh?" he shouted "Well, I'll just show you."

With this, he began jerking off his clothes. He had a fine head of curly red hair. This was a wig. He jerked it off, revealing a bald head ornamented with unmistakable horns. The suit came off next. When the last garment had been angrily flung against the bars, the devil stood stark naked.

The press, gazing upon this spectacle, was no longer incredulous. The occupant of the cell had hooves all right. He stamped them against the stone floor. Sparks flew. He also had a tail, which terminated in a horny point. Thrusting the tail between the bars, he jabbed a reporter in the leg.

"E-yow!" shouted this representative of the press.

"I guess that shows you smart guys something," the devil said, in a satisfied tone of voice.

Grady and Waller witnessed this scene from a little distance. Grady was perspiring freely and Waller had a decidedly thoughtful look on his face. Sergeant Buck was with them.

"You know what?" Grady said hesitantly.

"Yeah," Waller said. " been thinking the same thing. He said you and me were going down in his book."

Grady shuddered.

"Don't let that bother you, boys," Sergeant Buck said. "You did a good

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job. The force will stand back of you."

"It ain't somebody to stand back of me that I want," Grady answered. "It's somebody to stand in *front* of me."

It had suddenly occurred to Grady that he might spend the rest of his life dodging a revenge-seeking devil. This was not a comforting thought.

"You boys caught the devil all right," Sergeant Buck said. "But the thing that is worrying me is—*what are we going to do with him?*"

Almost simultaneously the same idea occurred to the chastened press. The reporters went immediately to the fountain of all knowledge, and put the question to him.

FOR once in his life the mayor was struck dumb. Until that moment he had been making a speech, to which no one was listening, to the effect that the police department, under his administration, "Has become so efficient that it can catch the devil himself."

"All right, you've caught him," a reporter said. "But what are you going to do with him now that you've got him?"

"I—uh—we—that is—." His Honor floundered. He immediately perceived that this problem had more angles than he had thought. It was one thing to catch the devil. It was quite another thing to decide what to do with him. The mayor didn't know the answer. He turned to the chief of police. The chief shook his head.

"Here they come down our street," said Grady bitterly, seeing what was going to happen.

It happened. The chief asked Captain Gallagher and the captain asked Sergeant Buck.

"I don't know what the hell we're going to do with him!" Grady shouted at the Sergeant. "We just caught him. It's up to you big shots to decide what to do about him. I only work here."

"You might hang him," the reporter who had been jabbed in the leg suggested. "He's guilty enough to be hung a thousand times over."

The occupant of the cell overhead this suggestion.

"I'd like to see you mugs try to hang me!" he shouted. "It wouldn't work, of course; the rope would break and the scaffold would fall down and a lot of other things would happen. But I'd like to see you try it," he ended, blowing smoke and yellow flames out of his mouth.

"I don't—ah—believe we will hang him," the mayor said nervously. "Is that burning brimstone I smell?"

"I ain't nothing else but brimstone," the devil answered.

"How about shooting him?" a detective asked.

The devil snorted in derision. "You point a gun at me it won't go off. Also," he added, "I would hate to be in the shoes of any guy who does try to take a shot at me."

The idea of shooting their captive was promptly dropped. "We of course can't shoot him," the mayor quickly said. "That would be against the law."

"Well, what *are* you going to do with him?" the press demanded.

"I'm just waitin' for you mugs to try to do *anything* with me!" the devil shouted from his cell. "I got powers I ain't been using yet. I'm waiting to see how far you will go. The minute you go too far, I'm going to start kicking this joint apart. There won't be one stone left on top of another when I get through."

He emphasized this statement by kicking the bars of his cell. The bars, an inch in diameter, were made of honest steel. But with no apparent effort, using only his bare hoof, the devil kicked two of them out.

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"How do you like that?" he asked. "That's only a sample of what I can do when I get really mad. And," he ended, "I'm getting pretty mad now."

FROM bulging eyes the mayor stared at the broken bars. He wiped his forehead. "I—ah—feel a sudden illness," he said to the chief of police. "I—ah leave this matter entirely in your hands. Both I, and the voters of this fair city, will expect a satisfactory conclusion to it. Now I—ah—due to this sudden illness that has overtaken me—am going home."

With that, the mayor departed. He was going home. Catching crooks, he felt, was the duty of the police. Disposing of them after they were caught was also within the province of the police department.

The chief stared wildly around him.

"Well, what are *you* going to do?" a reporter asked.

"A conference," the chief said. "I'm going to call a conference. I want all the captains to come to my office, immediately, to confer with me."

The press would gladly have sat in on that conference but the door was slammed in their face.

Grady stared ominously at the closed door. "I got a feeling I know what's going to happen," he said.

Five minutes later the door opened and the captains emerged. Captain Gallagher, of the plainclothes squad, came straight to Sergeant Buck. "The chief has had a sudden heart attack," Captain Gallagher said. "He's gone home. He went out the side door."

The captain paused and looked at the floor. "I feel kind of like I might have a heart attack coming on myself," he said. "So I'm leaving everything to you, Sergeant. I'm sure you will be able to handle this matter."

Captain Gallagher at least had the grace to look ashamed of himself. But ashamed or not, with one last startled look at those broken bars, he left.

"I knew it," Grady said bitterly. "Everybody's going home but us."

Sergeant Buck did not even bother to look ashamed. "Under the circumstances," he said to his two men. "I am going to leave this matter in your hands."

"But—" Grady started to protest.

"You caught him," said Sergeant Buck. "You damned well have got to decide what to do with him, and do it. I might mention that, if you don't solve this problem, you will have to settle with me."

With these grim words, Sergeant Buck joined the general exodus of the homeward bound.

DETECTIVE Waller was a man who could get an idea. "I rank you," he said, edging toward the door. "I've been in the service longer than you have and I rank you—"

"No," said Grady, reaching out and grabbing Waller by the collar. "You stay."

Waller stayed. The press also stayed, demanding to know what was going to be done.

"Well," said Grady. "There's one thing that ain't been tried."

"What's that?" a reporter asked.

"I'm not telling," Grady said. Nor would he give the nervous reporters a single hint of his plan. Instead he went to the locker room, and returning in a few minutes, stalked straight to the door of the cell in which the devil was incarcerated.

The reporters watched him. He took a key out of his pocket and inserted it in the lock.

"Are you going to open that door?" a reporter demanded.

"I am," Grady answered, turning

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the key determinedly in the lock.

Up to this point the press had been brave to the point of foolhardiness. The reporters had badgered the mayor, the chief, the police in general, and even the devil himself, through the bars. But the instant Grady turned the key in the lock, the press, to a man, departed from the building. The repair department spent the next week putting a new door on the front entrance, so hurriedly did the press depart.

"They didn't think it was a good idea to unlock this cell," said Waller, nervously watching the press depart.

"It may not be," said Grady. "But I'm going to open it."

At his tug the heavy grill slid aside.

"Come on out," he said to the occupant of the cell.

THE devil stood there. He was exuding a powerful odor of brimstone and his tail was swishing through the air with a sound like a scythe cutting through grass. There was surprise on his face as he looked at Grady and Waller.

"What are you two thugs up to now?" he demanded.

Grady wiped sweat from his face.

"You're the two strong arm boys who worked me over and brought me in, ain't you?" the devil demanded, staring at them.

"That," said Grady, "is right. And for that, I now wish to apologize."

"Huh?" The devil was startled.

"We had been kicked around some ourselves," the detective explained. "So when you showed fight, we naturally worked you over a little. All we can say is we are sorry it happened and it won't happen again."

"Well I'm damned!" the devil gasped.

"I can't say about that," Grady answered. "But if you are willing to let bygones be bygones, we are certainly willing to do the same. We are also willing to turn you loose and let you go to hell in peace." That is," he added quickly, "if hell is where you want to go."

"Great demons!" the devil gasped. "Do you really mean it?"

"We certainly do;" Grady answered firmly. "And to show our good faith —" He fumbled in his coat and brought out a bottle—the same bottle that Sergeant Buck had caught them sampling earlier in the evening. "Here," he finished, thrusting the bottle toward the devil. "Have a drink."

For a minute the devil seemed doubtful. Smoke in twin jets continued to puff from his nostrils. Then the smoke began to diminish. A broad grin appeared on his face.

"I don't mind if I do," he said, reaching for the bottle. Taking a long drink, he gazed fondly at the detectives. "This is the first time anything like this has happened to me in centuries. I'm not really a bad guy," he continued, "but you humans have kicked me around so long that I've had to fight back. The result is, I've got a bad reputation."

"Yes sir," said Grady, still perspiring. "You sure have. And now," he continued, "are you willing to go back to hell and leave Center City alone?"

"Sure," the devil promptly answered. "Anybody that treats me half way right can be certain they will be treated right in return. I don't mind admitting that I was about ready to tear this town apart. But since you fellows have treated me right, I'll call my boys off and we'll leave Center City alone in the future. Do you mind," he ended, "if I take this bottle along with me?"

"Not at all," said Grady fervently. "Not at all. If you will just wait until I can raid the chief's locker, I'll get you a whole case."

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"By golly!" said the devil, grinning from ear to ear. "You sure are fine fellows. Sure, I'll wait."

Five minutes later, with the case under one arm, in a flash of fire and brimstone, he vanished.

"Great jumping demons!" Waller gasped, gazing in awe at his companion. "How did you figure out what to do?"

"We had tried everything but kindness," Grady said sentimentally. "So I thought I'd try that. Poor devil! Nobody had been nice to him in centuries and he was so surprised he hardly knew what to do. Kindness," he ended, "whether used on dumb animals or the devil, certainly pays."

THUS the story ends. It is interesting to note, however, that the chastened and rather frightened press, in reporting this matter, agreed that it would not be wise to mention the presence of the devil in Center City. It would not be good business. Consequently the papers reported, in broad headlines, that the mayor's clean-up campaign was a complete success and that Center City was now a fit place to rear children. The papers also supported the mayor's campaign for re-election, which terminated satisfactorily. The crime wave in Center City, the papers admitted, was not the fault of the mayor.

It is also interesting to note, when the various interested parties were fully informed of the method by which the devil had been induced to leave Center City, that a new spirit immediately appeared in the community. Whereas in the past lawbreakers had been most harshly dealt with, and honest citizens parking fifteen minutes overtime, had been sternly reproved, now the rare violator of the law was treated with such extraordinary kindness that he was ashamed of himself. And if a citizen should park by a fire plug, the cop on the beat did not snarl at him, but moved the car himself. Kindness, in Center City, is being worked overtime, and even those ex-boy scouts on the police force, Sergeant Buck, Grady, and Waller—the last two receiving promotions as a result of their part in the affair of the devil—are now known for their courtesy and helpfulness. By those who knew them in the sad old days of sin, this is regarded as a modern miracle.

THE END

(Continued from page 6)

WE think, or rather we know, the author who has made the greatest impression on you all at rare intervals with his delightful and unusual short stories, is Robert Bloch, the sage of Milwaukee. Well, we have him once more, in this issue, with a real rib-tickler. It's "Time Wounds All Heels". The title alone will give you a slight idea of what's in store for you.

ONCE upon a time we ran two stories in an issue by Nelson S. Bond. Heresy, said other authors. Usually editors conceal such perfidy under a pen-name, which supposedly, makes it all right. But what's wrong, say we, with running two stories in an issue by one writer? If a writer can occasionally turn out two masterpieces in one month, who are we to hide it under a smoke screen? So that's why you'll find Don Wilcox with us twice this month. "Bull Moose Of Babylon" is a story that reminds us of A. Merritt's "The Ship Of Ishtar", perhaps because it is so different. But it has a new, sweeping flavor to it that strikes us just as Merritt's famous tale did the first time we read it. And we predict that many of you will read this fantastic tale of Babylon over in years to come, and delight in it again.

TALK about characters! Here's Oscar, the little Martian detective returning! James Norman, now reaching fame as a novelist with his "Murder, Chop Chop", has given us another one about the little fellow. And in it, the nasty Japs get what's coming to 'em, bless his little Martian science! Incidentally, the idea behind this story is based on truth itself, and scientifically, it would be entirely possible to change the climate of our country in just such a manner as Oscar so adroitly foils.

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BUT enough of the contents of this issue. We'll leave a few of the many other treats to your own discovery. Just browse through this giant issue and enjoy it. We've made sure that there's not a story in it that won't ring bells all over the place. My, how we like to brag—but my how proud we are of this issue; and can you blame us?

AFTER a long time, we finally present to you Mr. Virgil Finlay, with not one, but two illustrations in this issue. And you can bet he'll be back with us regularly from now on. In fact, he's got a standing order to create lovely drawings, even if we have no story in mind. Our authors have taken to our cover-inspiration policy so well that they have suggested interior illustrations will serve the same purpose. We've already done it once—in the case of Magarian, who sold us one of his "samples". The final result was a story called "Mademoiselle Butterfly" which you'll be seeing in these pages next month.

RIGHT about here it seems appropriate that we announce the impending birth of a new member of the Ziff-Davis pulp magazine family. It is *Mammoth Detective*, planned to lead the detective field just as *Amazing Stories* and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES lead the science fiction and fantasy fields respectively. Which ought to be enough for you among our readers who also enjoy good detective fiction. Watch for the date of its appearance. You won't want to miss it.

RECENTLY we visited New York. Editorially, it was a fine trip, because we met such authors as David V. Reed, John Broome, Eando Binder, Alfred Bester, Arthur T. Harris, and many others. And the result will be many fine stories for you readers. It seems even on a vacation, we can't resist digging up good things for you.

However, we have a personal grudge against those two screwball authors, William P. McGivern and David Wright O'Brien. Hearing that we were leaving for the big city, they saw us off. Skipping the details, which included singing a lusty trio about the sidewalks of a certain city, in a crowded railroad station, we finally regained consciousness to discover that the interval between Chicago and Cleveland was a blank. We, upon our honor, hereby promise that someday, somehow, we will pour those two very good authors onto a train to some ungodly place far from nowhere, and chuckle with glee over their plight when they awoke.

A FEW personal bits about New York and those authors: David V. Reed recently sold us a novel (of which you'll certainly hear more in the near future) and promptly bought a new radio and record player. A very grand affair, to be sure, and knowing your editor's liking for music, he had many of our favorite recordings ready, and we certainly enjoyed them. But his pretty wife confided that she wanted a new rug for the living room floor. Which probably means Dave will be writing at least a long novelet for us soon.

However, we saw a model of a U. S. destroyer which Reed made, and considering the writing time he spent on it, its value is around $400.00. He advised us to get a hobby for ourselves. Well, we have one. A big issue like this is plenty hobby for us!

JULIUS SCHWARTZ, author and agent, cannot take it. Champagne is his nemesis. Your editor saw him put to bed long before the New Year rang its lusty and portentious way in. Incidentally, Julius is responsible for those fine stories by such authors as Wellman, Bester, Ayre, Fearn, Cross, Broome, etc., etc. It is his guidance that results in many of the treats we present to you.

THE Nelson S. Bonds are celebrating the arrival of an heir. A howling success of a son, who will one day become a faithful FANTASTIC ADVENTURES reader, promises his dad. And the little fellow arrived as the New Year was only 35 minutes old!

HOW did we manage to neglect mentioning that there were *two* new authors in this issue? Besides Harold Lawlor, we have Gerald Vance, with an odd little story about a schizophrenic—a person with two separate and distinct egos. We think you'll like Mr. Vance, and we hope he'll be back again in the future.

H. W. McCAULEY has just finished a new Mac Girl painting which strikes us as one of the finest he's ever done. For you readers who have wanted a real "class" cover, this is it. It has an elegance that none of his other paintings have had, and the Mac Girl—boy-oh-boy! No need to say any more about her.

Incidentally, why don't you write Mac a letter and give him some suggestions on what the Mac Girl ought to do next? He'd welcome your ideas, we're sure. We'll pass on any letters you address to him, care of this magazine.

RIGHT at the present moment we can't think of any suitable fantastic dimension to which we could transfer the island of Japan. It would be a dirty trick on said dimension if it happened to be inhabited by decent folks!

SO with that, we'll close our notebook for this month. Keep 'em flying, thumbs up, remember Pearl Harbor, and keep your shirts on, Hitler and Mussolini—we'll get to you in due time!

RAP

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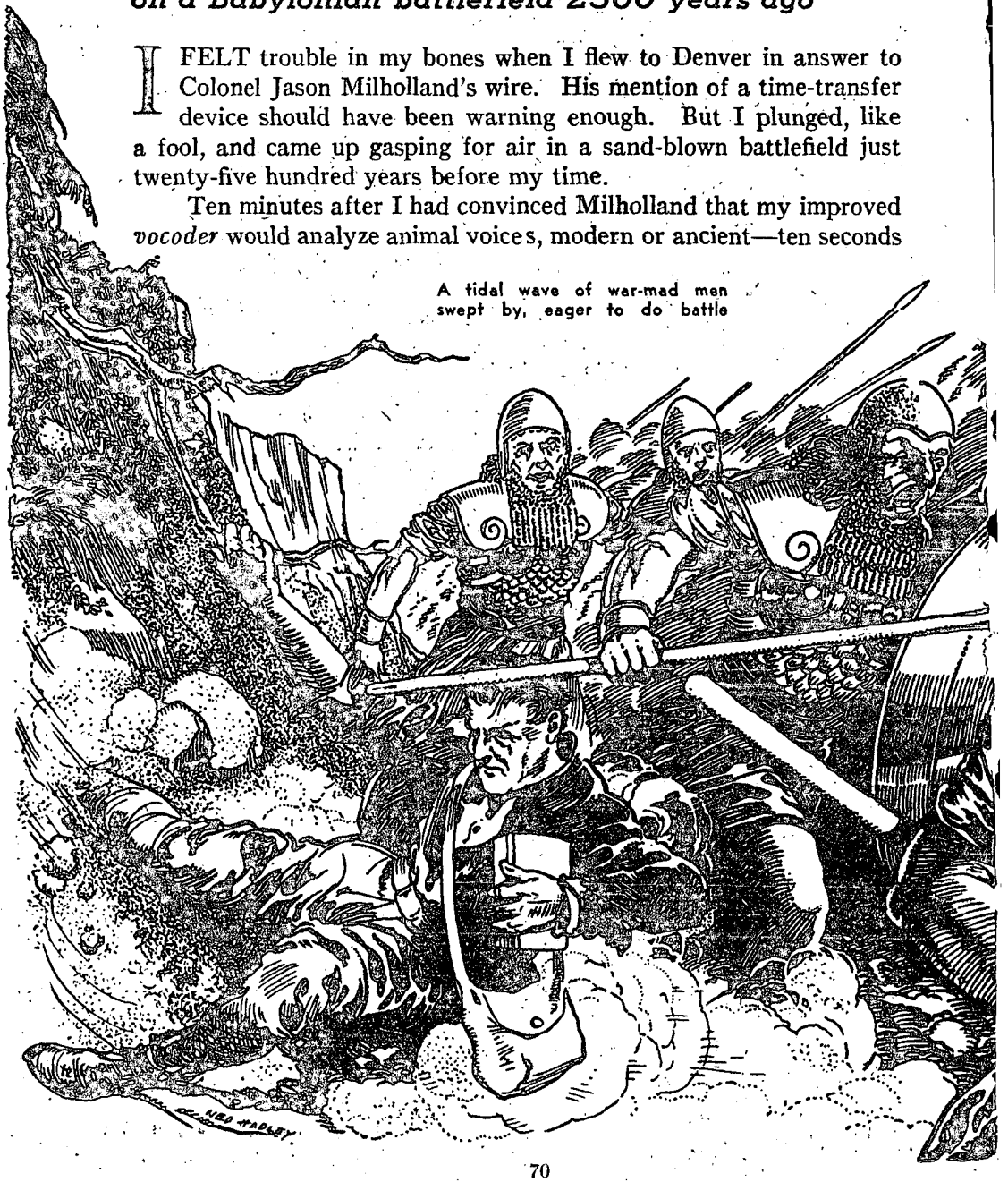
Bull Moose of

by Don Wilcox

The time-transfer machine deposited them on a Babylonian battlefield 2500 years ago

I FELT trouble in my bones when I flew to Denver in answer to Colonel Jason Milholland's wire. His mention of a time-transfer device should have been warning enough. But I plunged, like a fool, and came up gasping for air in a sand-blown battlefield just twenty-five hundred years before my time.

Ten minutes after I had convinced Milholland that my improved *vocoder* would analyze animal voices, modern or ancient—ten seconds



A tidal wave of war-mad men swept by, eager to do battle

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after I had nodded my agreement to his outrageous proposition, I was biffed across the head by an ancient Persian soldier.

That's how quick it happened.

One moment I was standing on the Colonel's roof porch surrounded by the glories of the Rockies; then the big red cylinder swished down out of nowhere, like a series of neon hoops, to enclose me, and the next instant I was skidding down a sandy incline that wasn't a golf hazard, and the desert dust and battle din was all around me. I hugged my precious black case and slid for the bottom of the ravine.

That was when the wild-eyed soldier dashed past me, flashing and steaming in his metal armor, and whammed me —accidentally, but none the less potently—across the head with the handle of his spear.

"Wa-ha-kik-log!" he was yelling, and he must have been brass inside as well as out. He didn't stop to notice me. He was charging into the fray, along with a few thousand other mad men.

"Wa-ha-kik-log!"

Such voices! If Colonel Milholland wanted a complete collection of the bellows of beasts, he should have had these.

But there was no time to operate my vocoder amid this chaos. My first duty to mankind was to avoid being tramped to death. Already my new hunting togs were being torn to shreds. I rolled into a knot and hugged the hot sand and let the stampede hurdle past. But some clumsy heavyweight came pounding along, dragging his feet, and kicked the daylights out of me.

When I came to, after hours of blackout, I was *not* in a downy hospital bed, and no kindly doctor was bending over me. My first impression was that my scalp had been carved in strips, that I had been hung on a hook by a segment of hide just above my right ear, that someone was striking the hook with a maul at regular intervals.

This impression underwent a slight modification as consciousness came clearer. I was actually walking on my two feet, along with some five hundred other ragged and battered prisoners of war, and my scalp was cut, not with any geometric precision, but rather in the style that a blind man with a meat cleaver might achieve.

I was still hanging onto the little black case, however. And I managed to cling to it through the unprintable year and a half that followed.

OF THOSE hectic eighteen months of imprisonment and slavery all I need say is that I gradually became accustomed to my fate. I had no power to take myself back to the twentieth century. Evidently Colonel Milholland had lost his power to bring me back. I was stuck.

During that year and a half I had learned a lot of ancient language, but I detested having to use it. My roots were in the twentieth century. I couldn't reconcile myself to starting life over—in an age that was past and gone.

Then one day, while on the block with seventy other bedraggled assorted prisoners waiting to be sold, I noticed that one of my fellow unfortunates was eyeing me curiously. We fell into casual conversation, as casual as possible against the auctioneer's insulting blather about our respective worths in

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"The breeding season begins in September, and mating goes on through the fall. At this season the bulls lose their natural timidity, become savage, and will readily attack any animal or even man, if their rage is aroused."—From the New International Encyclopedia description of the moose.—*"Bull Moose of Babylon."*

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shekels.

"My name is Slaf-Carch," said the man, smiling toothlessly through his steel wool whiskers. His voice was resonant. "I have seen members of your race before. You are from a foreign land."

"And a foreign time," I said, not expecting him to make anything of it.

His twinkling eyes fairly snapped at me. "You are the third," he said, "who has made that claim."

"The third *what?*"

"The third invader from a foreign land and time. You have the same delicate dialect as the other two. That is what caught my attention. Do you have a foreign name?"

"My name is Hal Norton," I said. "Where are these other two you speak of?" Suspicions whipped through my mind. Had Colonel Milholland sent other twentieth-century envoys back to this age? I remembered having tried to probe Milholland on this, but he had evaded me.

"One was killed under the wheel of an Assyrian chariot," said Slaf-Carch, stroking his bronzed bald head reminiscently. "The other is still my slave."

"*Your* slave?" This struck me as being more than curious, since Slaf-Carch himself was at this moment being sold as a slave. Undoubtedly this grizzly-whiskered man had seen better days, before some captor had knocked his teeth out.

The same nomad prince who bought Slaf-Carch began bidding on me, and an hour later, bought and paid for, we were tramping along the rugged foothills of the Fertile Crescent.

"You spoke of a slave with a dialect similar to mine," I resumed, trudging along beside Slaf-Carch. "What was his name?"

"*Her* name," Slaf-Carch corrected, "and a very odd name it is: *Betty.*"

There wasn't breath enough in me to comment. I needed to sit down and think this matter over, but the nomad prince and his guards had other ideas. We hiked on through the evening heat.

Obviously I wasn't the only victim of Milholland's time-trap. He had employed two other innocents in the service of his hare-brained hobby—one of them a girl. What price the voices of ancient animals!

"Does your Betty carry a black case like this?" I asked, indicating the vocoder.

Slaf-Carch knew nothing of any magic boxes. He probably would have been too superstitious to investigate, anyway. But he gave me other bits of information, enough to prove my assumptions. Both of my predecessors had demonstrated a strange interest in animals—an interest that had soon waned.

THAT night, long after the other slaves were asleep, Slaf-Carch and I were still talking. The red glow from the low fires gave his face intense lines. "I am eager to get back. If these nomads take us farther south, they shall lose us. We will escape."

"Where does this slave, Betty, live?" I asked.

"At my mansion, in a village beyond Babylon, where I should be fulfilling my duties as the *patesi,*" he said. "By this time, many business matters will have gone undone. As for Betty, this autumn I must give her separate quarters along with my older women slaves so she can begin bearing slave children."

"Just a minute, pal," I blurted in English, then caught myself. In Babylonian I said pointedly, "Take my word for it, if Betty came from my land you can cancel that plan."

"You do not know our ways, Hal,"

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he replied. "Betty has seen more of Babylon than you."

I didn't deny this. But it was as uncomfortable to swallow as a baseball. This girl might have had the hard luck to be stranded here and forced into the Babylonian slave system. But that didn't mean she would desert all her own twentieth-century ideals and sentiments. If she had the good American spunk to fight this ancient balderdash, I would fight with her; if she didn't, I hoped I would never meet her—in spite of being starved for some twentieth-century conversation.

Slaf-Carch sketched a picture in the sand to show me how beautiful Betty was. I couldn't make anything out of it, but the fire in his eyes conveyed a strong impression.

"Let her go her own way," I said shortly. "I'll go mine."

Slaf-Carch wanted to know what my way was. What did I do back home, and what did I expect to do here?

His questions stirred me to the depths. It was the first time any fellow-slave had talked in terms of purposes. I answered proudly that I, too, was a man of vast importance in my own land and time, and had no doubt been sorely missed. I had planned to help analyze radio voices, using my vocoder—a matter which he wouldn't understand — when my sudden time-transfer set my life back. No doubt my own civilization had simply marked time since my absence.

I snapped on a vocoder switch while we talked, thinking to demonstrate how easily I could break Slaf-Carch's voice into its separate parts—pitch, resonance, volume, and consonant qualities. But in deference to his superstitions I snapped the thing off without showing him the results.

Meanwhile, the old grizzle-beard speculated futilely upon my chances to return to my native country.

"If we can break free and reach Babylon, then I may be able to help you back to your land and time," he offered hopefully. "I have wealth. My nephew, Jipfur, is also quite rich."

I shook my head; tried to explain. But the time element was a stumbler for him. He looked blankly and fell to drawing another sand sketch of his Betty.

HOWEVER, these thoughts were no passing fancies with him. He persisted in digging into my history. I told him of my agreement to make a study of the voices of ancient animals; my arrival in the midst of battle; the stampede of Persian infantry, my months of slavery, my fights to hold on to my magic box—which was left to me only because its black color threw a superstitious scare into my captors. Those things he could understand much better than my burning desire for a bath, a shave, some Palm Beach clothes, a quarter ton of Neapolitan ice cream, and, most of all, a sudden lift back into my own century.

"Your trouble," he counselled, "is that you are refusing to accept your real situation."

"I don't want to accept it!" I said so loudly that one of the guards snapped his fingers at me. "I want to get out of it."

"Never hope to be lifted bodily out of trouble," Slaf-Carch said. "Things don't happen that way. I know. And I am much older than you."

I was tempted to challenge this statement, but he continued:

"Dig your hands into the soil of the hour, wherever you are, and claw through your own troubles."

"No more philosophy, please," I protested. "I've been on a diet of it for eighteen months. If you could offer me

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a candy bar—"

"Take the lion by the mane," he said sagely. "If your task is studying animals—"

"No animals, please," I said. "I've lost ninety-eight percent of my respect for the man who set me on that wild goose chase—or rather, moose chase."

"Then you must find other pastimes. The slaves are treated decently enough in this valley. They have a few hours each day to themselves. Besides, they need something to think about while they lift water at the *shaduf*. Something besides *revolt*."

"What do you think about while you are a slave?" I asked.

"Betty," he replied, none too stoically.

CHAPTER II

ONE night two weeks later we were attacked by a band of cavalrymen.

"Babylonians!" Slaf-Carch hissed in my ear. "Our chance!"

We slaves fled back into the darkness, out of reach of the swords and axes. When the fight grew hot we dodged into the leaping shadows and did our bit throwing stones. I'll never forget the smell of that desert dawn, nor the sight of flashing knives and falling heads. Sunlight showed our camp a shambles.

The Babylonian cavalrymen won the fray, in the end, so we slaves were in fair enough luck. If the nomads had won they'd have cut us to bits for helping the attackers. As matters had turned, we had earned a reward—the right to be slaves for the Babylonians.

Of course, those among us who were Babylonians and not foreigners were in double luck, for they were free.

But no one was so lucky as Slaf-Carch. By a rare chance, this war party had been sent out by his own nephew, the rich young *patesi* of Babylon—Jipfur.

We traveled all night, and those of us on foot were near exhaustion by dawn. Then patches of reflected sunlight appeared on the distant desert horizon to quicken our pace. Those sharp little rectangles grew before our eyes during the hours of travel that followed. For they were the buildings of Babylon, their glazed tile walls gleaming like mirrors.

The glorious Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar! What a thrill for a wanderer from the machine-age! Speaking of machines, I craved one as never before—preferably a motorcar or an airplane. My legs threatened to fold up with every step.

That afternoon summer clouds floated over the city, reducing Babylon's glaring colors to pastel blues, yellows, lavenders. The city walls spread wide along the Euphrates, the palaces reared high, and a great multi-storied *ziggurat* towered into the clouds. No twentieth century skyline was ever more breathtaking. As a matter of fact, only the tallest of New-World skyscrapers rose—or would rise, twenty-five hundred years hence—to a greater height than this magnificent *ziggurat*.

It was twilight when we at last neared the city's gates. Jipfur, the nephew of Slaf-Carch, rode out to join us, accompanied by two armored cavalrymen.

"Noble Slaf-Carch, the *patesi* of Borbel, the brother of my mother, you have returned from the dead!"

The meeting was replete with formal greetings—it was plain to see that Jipfur relished the dignified formalities to which his wealth and importance entitled him—but under the surface of conventional manners, Slaf-Carch's deep gratitude showed through glistening eyes. No matter if his rescue had been coincidental; he was no less grate-

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ful for having been miraculously saved.

JIPFUR made the most of it. He rode back at the head of the procession, boasting that he had sent his cavalrymen against the nomads on a hunch that it would please the gods.

We entered the gates of Babylon. The street crowds joined our procession, shouted praises to Jipfur.

"Again Jipfur has won against the nomads!"

"Jipfur has brought back the *patesi* of Borbel!"

Jipfur smiled jubilantly, holding his pudgy head high, blinking his eyes wisely, nodding ever so slightly toward the wealthier merchants and their wives.

Slaf-Carch was too happy to mind these egotistical antics. He was wearing a robe over his rags, now, and riding a cavalryman's horse. He waved at the throngs and shouted jovially at old acquaintances. The warmth of this reception made me proud I knew him, even if he was a superstitious old coot.

"Yes, I was becoming entangled in Babylonian alliances in spite of myself.

Eventually this night's celebration ended, and I was glad. All the wonders of Babylon, including my first torchlight glimpse of the famous Hanging Gardens and the "Tower-of-Babel" ziggurat, could not impress me, on this tired night, half so much as Slaf-Carch's hospitality.

Once we reached his palace, at the small suburb of Borbel, and once I had shaved and bathed and feasted, I laid myself away in a comfortable bed for an indefinite season of sleeping. For Slaf-Carch had commanded that I was to be his special guest until my strength returned.

And so, after more than eighteen months of hardships, I turned a corner —and it proved to be a swift turn in more ways than one.

I lay in bed two mornings later, debating whether I felt equal to the task of rising and dressing, and had just given up the struggle and let my eyes fall closed, when I heard someone approaching my room.

Then I was half aware that a servant-girl entered. I saw her through my eyelids, I suppose, for I was too groggy from sleep to raise my head and wink at her—or order her out, as you might have done. Still, I knew that there was something unusual about her —something disturbingly strange—

She placed some fresh clothing on the foot of my bed, drew a curtain back from the window to admit the fresh yellow sunshine, picked up the empty water vase from my table. For a moment she looked down at me curiously—

I don't know whether my half-closed eyelids fluttered, but my pulse did. It struck me like a bolt of lightning: *This girl was a blonde.*

Nowhere in all these months had I seen a single light-haired person, male or female, before this moment. The Fertile Crescent just didn't have 'em. Maybe the soil wasn't right, or the sun was too hot. In a land of sand-blown brunettes, here was an off-color female whose beautiful face, blue eyes, and yellow braids—not to mention breath-taking curves—were calculated to make kings hurl armies at each other.

She was not only beautiful; her cleanliness and her make-up—though the latter was too cunningly achieved to be noticeable—were twenty-five centuries ahead of these times.

SHE tiptoed toward the door with the water vase, being careful not to waken me. But my eyes were wide open now, and I called to her in English, with the gentleness of a dynamite

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blast: "Hey, there, you're Betty, aren't you?"

The water vase crashed to the floor—I couldn't understand why. I hadn't meant to knock her off the Christmas tree, but she whirled on me with a show of anger.

"Why do you scare me to death, you snail, you worm!" she blazed in Babylonian, marching over to my bed, shaking a scornful finger at me. "Are you some kind of earthquake, that roars and knocks vases out of people's hands?"

"Wait a minute. I—" Again I started to speak in English, but her rapid-fire Babylonian threw me for a loss. The language was rich in profanity. She called down the wrath of Shamash on me, and threw in the ill-will of Marduk and Ishtar for good measure. I pulled the covers up around my ears.

By that time other servants and palace attendants were coming down the corridor to see what had caused the crash. To my surprise, the girl bent close to me and snapped, in a warning tone:

"I'll talk with you later—in English."

The broken pottery was swept up, though it couldn't possibly be patched up, no more than could my peace of mind. Not that either had any value in this palace. Vases might be broken, slaves might be suspicious of Betty—or jealous; but the startling point of the incident was that Slaf-Carch himself came in and cleaned up the mess.

Yes, he insisted on doing it, so that I, his guest, wouldn't be disturbed by chattering slaves. But Slaf-Carch's real reason, I saw plainly, was to perform a favor for Betty. He smiled at her, toothlessly, without the slightest air of superiority, notwithstanding the fact that he was the owner of this palace and all that was in it, including her. Suddenly I felt resentment.

He stopped to exchange pleasantries with me, too, hoping I would feast with him soon; then, as Betty started off to her work elsewhere, he walked away with her.

A jealous heat-wave did spirals around my neck for the rest of the day. It was a bad feeling for me, a guest, to have toward my benefactor. Which started me to thinking. If I could *pay* Slaf-Carch for this hospitality—if I could pull some strings so that I didn't owe him anything; that would clear the decks considerably. Then I could face him squarely, tell him that a fifty-year-old Babylonian had no business getting that way about a nineteen-year-old foreigner-girl. Especially when there was a young foreigner-bachelor on the scene.

All right, that settled it. I would pay cash for these few days of room and board—

BUT my situation wasn't as simple as I thought. Before I had been Slaf-Carch's guest a full week, his rich young nephew Jipfur charioted out from Babylon and announced that he had come for me.

"I'm very comfortable here, thank you," I said.

"According to the property laws," Jipfur stated in his smooth but arrogant manner, "you are my rightful slave. You were taken from the nomads by my expedition. You have good muscles and will be worth all of ninety shekels, when properly nourished and put in working trim."

Slaf-Carch protested, but his nephew stuck stubbornly to his claim. Slaf-Carch shrugged and said, "Then I will buy Hal from you at once."

Jipfur rudely reminded him that he couldn't afford me. The ugly truth was that Slaf-Carch's business had run

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down badly during his two years of absence, his finances having been nominally in the hands of his nephew.

So I was Jipfur's property.

"I regret," said Slaf-Carch, placing his hand on my shoulder, "that I cannot purchase you now. But the time will come, and I will remember." Then driving the hint of anger out of his resonant voice, he concluded with a remark characteristic of his generosity, "My family is so proud of Jipfur, with his dynamic business talents, I could not think of withholding from him any prestige he has earned. Go, and be a worthy slave for him."

As we started toward Babylon, the reins were placed in my hands. I had just as well learn to drive a chariot now, Jipfur said, if I were capable. Kish, the slave who was Jipfur's personal attendant, stood beside me to teach me the tricks.

Our wheels sung over the sandy tracks, we trotted down the palmy lane that led out of the suburb. Beyond the gates Jipfur snapped his fingers, and Kish, quick on the trigger, grabbed the reins out of my hands and stopped the horses.

The cause of the sudden stop was the sight of three ugly partially-masked heads peering out of the tall cat-tails in the roadside marsh. I was at a loss to know whether they were humans or scarecrows, and Kish wasn't much help when he whispered, "The Serpents."

To my surprise, Jipfur seemed to be on speaking terms with these ragged, uncouth, deformed creatures. He gave them a few simple orders, and they listened like three docile sheep.

"Understand, I want you to keep apart," Jipfur said. "There is territory enough to keep you busy separately. If people see you together too often you'll lose your charm."

Our chariot rolled on, and neither Kish nor Jipfur made any comment to reveal what sort of charm those forlorn and sinister-looking wretches possessed. Kish was stiffly silent, as a good attendant should be, and I took my cue from him. Jipfur, oblivious to us, hummed pleasantly to himself.

WE SWUNG off what was apparently the main road, took a by-lane past a square of irrigated farm land, and stopped only when we came to the bank of the Euphrates river. Here three female slaves were operating a *shaduf,* letting the pole down until the long bucket filled, then elevating it and pouring it into the irrigation trough.

One of the workers was Betty.

Jipfur stepped down from the chariot, walked over to them and asked for a drink.

"Do you think he is thirsty?" Kish asked me.

That was a strange question, coming from the lips of this slim, handsome, well-disciplined young attendant. Its cynicism told me volumes. Kish's silence in his master's presence was the silence of dynamite in cold storage. But he was opening the way to an understanding between the two of us. He added, "If that yellow-haired girl were at the top of yonder ziggurat, Jipfur would go there to be thirsty."

"Now that I think of it," I said, "I'm thirsty too."

I chanced the wrath of my new master and all his gods by my bold action. I stepped down from the chariot, and before Jipfur came up from the water jug to give me a merciless bawling-out, I got in a sly word with Betty—and that was what really counted.

"I've just been chained to Jipfur," I said. "But I'll break jail whenever you say—"

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"Here—one week from tonight," she whispered, scarcely looking at me, "when the late moon rises."

Jipfur ordered me back into the chariot, and after he had finished his joking with Betty, telling her he had tried to buy her, but Slaf-Carch had wanted all of four shekels, and he knew she was only worth two, we drove back down the lane. And you can bet I memorized every turn in the road between that *shaduf* and the gates of Babylon.

CHAPTER III

ONE week later, an hour after midnight, I slipped out of Babylon and dog-trotted southward. I was a good hour ahead of the moon—only there wouldn't be a moon tonight, or stars either. The blackness was broken only by the city's torchlights and an occasional flare of lightning.

No threatening storm could have kept me from my appointment. The past week of waiting had been like a year.

Not that I hadn't been busy every minute. Learning to work for Jipfur was no cinch. But, luckily for me, the tall lanky attendant, Kish, had tipped me off to the arrogant *patesi's* pet peeves, and tutored me on those matters that every young slave ought to know. Such as, the best way to walk out of the master's palace at midnight without being caught.

Thunder rumbled over my head. "Betty won't be there," I kept telling myself. "The storm may stop her. Or Slaf-Carch—"

Up went my temperature again! After all the talk I had heard the past week, the very thought of Slaf-Carch and Jipfur set me on fire with jealousy. The rich young nephew was determined to buy Betty before fall. His uncle was holding out stubbornly.

I groped along through the darkness, praying cynically to Marduk to keep me between the irrigation ditches and stop me before I walked into the river. Then a streak of lightning burned across the horizon, and there were the black poles of the *shaduf* right before me, and there was Betty waiting. Her braids, blowing in the breeze, were platinum under the purple flash.

"You are here," I said in Babylonian. "Did anyone come with you?"

"No one. I didn't dare tell anybody I was coming."

Her fluent English was music to my ears. Her low voice was rich and melodic, and I couldn't help thinking what an interesting study it would be on the vocoder.

"Sporting of you to come," I said. "It's a queer time and place for a date, but if Babylonians go in for this sort of thing, far be it from me to—"

"Don't lead me into the river, Mr. Norton," she said, and her fingers clinging lightly to my arm drew me back.

"Just call me Hal," I said, sensing that I was quoting a line no doubt trite even in these ancient times.

"It's good luck to be near the Euphrates," said Betty, "but not so good to fall in it."

We sat on the sandy bank, enshrouded by darkness. Betty repeated a rhythmic little Babylonian proverb about the Euphrates and good luck. There was a legend, she said, that if you looked upon the Euphrates a certain number of times—the exact number being unknown—you would not die as other men. You would live on, and your manner of life would become a mystery to all men.

"Very probably," I said.

"You mustn't doubt it," Betty declared. "The Babylonians can prove it. Have you seen a funny little flat-headed

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man who stands at the foot of the great ziggurat? He has stood there for generations, and they say he'll still be there when the ziggurat is gone. That's because he looked upon the Euphrates—"

"The right number of times—yes. Very fanciful."

MY SLIGHTLY sarcastic interruption caused a momentary rift. I couldn't conceive of Betty's taking any stock in this balderdash, even though some of these superstitious ancients might choose to believe it.

"Curious if true," I added, after the silence had become oppressive. "I'll stop and talk with that funny little flat-headed man some day."

"He can't talk—but he's there."

"Can't? Is he alive?"

"He's petrified—but he's *there.*"

I'm afraid I laughed rather too heartily. Betty didn't intend any joke. With all the earnestness of a superstition-befogged Babylonian she clung to her fanciful story. He was *there,* she repeated, so in a sense he was living on, in a manner of life that was a mystery to all men.

It was my turn to fall silent. Lightning flashed across the sky, raindrops began to spatter intermittently.

"We'd better find shelter," said Betty.

She caught my hand and led me along the riverbank to an overhanging rock that protected us from the plopping drops. It was a shelter which the slaves often frequented, she said. I couldn't see a thing until the purple lightning came. Then I caught sight of the shallow cavern we were in, a few yards above the broad Euphrates. Now all was black again, except for a few twinkling torchlights eight miles upstream—Babylon, asleep.

"This river gets into your blood. It's making me over. It will do the same for you."

"Not if I can help it," I thought. Aloud I said, "I've got no business here. If there's any way to go back to twentieth century America—"

"I know how you feel. I pampered myself with the same sentiments for the first year."

"How long have you been here?"

"Nearly three years."

"So you got trapped by the Colonel's lousy line, too?" I said, at last enjoying an opportunity to uncork my compressed bitterness. "I suppose Milholland gave you the same pep talk he gave me—one week of the past—or two at most—a thousand dollars a week—fame and immortality for your contribution to his celebrated collection of animal voices?"

"Something like that," said Betty reflectively.

"The guy's a screwball."

"Definitely."

"How'd you get mixed up with him in the first place?"

"He's my uncle," said Betty, and I groaned like a punctured balloon. She went on, unheeding, "He's no ordinary screwball—he's the grand duke of all screwballs. That's why we're stuck here. You don't mind my talking about it?"

"Mind? I've practically gone blind for lack of light on the subject," I said.

THE rain was smashing down on the vast river now and our cavern roared and groaned with echoes of the violent percussions. The warm rock wall was at our backs. Our shoulders barely touched. Betty talked, and her voice, close to my ear, was like a magic whisper from far flung centuries against the roar of the ages.

"I'll begin with my father," she said. "He was a great man—a genius. If he had lived, the world would have

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looked up to him. He was a student of Einstein, but he had his own distinct theories of universes interlocked through time. His experiments were highly successful up to that fateful year when he began to use time-transfer devices."

"Then your father was Professor Clifton Milholland, the physicist and inventor?"

"Yes. Unfortunately his laboratory fell to my uncle, the absent-minded Colonel, who is so zaney about making a name for himself as a naturalist that he'd gladly send you to the sun if any new animal calls were to be found there. That's why you came here, wasn't it? What did you bring, a phonograph-recorder?"

"A vocoder," I said. "You've seen the mused, I suppose? They break a voice down into its simple elements, such as volume—tone qualities—pitch."

"I remember," said Betty. "And they remake voices, too."

"Right. This instrument of mine is the latest, most compact model. I could take an impression of your voice; then, by operating the keys, I could make it speak my words to you *in your voice* —that is, in the same pitch-range, with the same overtones, the same consonant qualities, and so on. Your own mother wouldn't know but what it was you."

"Remarkable," she mused. "Have you used it?"

"Not once. . . Well, I did take a record of Slaf-Carch's voice—he was a vibrant, mellow baritone, you know —but I never completed the demonstration. We were prisoners at the time, and he was more interested in telling me about a foreigner-girl named Betty."

Betty quickly shifted the subject away from dangerous ground. "I suppose Jipfur has been curious about the instrument?"

"He's never seen it," I said.

"Then you've hid it?"

"The fact is, I got rid of it a few days before Jipfur claimed me."

"Got *rid* of it?"

"Sold it—to a peddler with a mule cart full of secondhand junk. I needed a little coin to buy a present for Slaf-Carch in exchange for my keep. The peddler paid a good price. He said he could pan it off on some magician as a magic box. It *looks* magic enough—a solid black case—heavy—"

"You must be a cousin to Jack and the Bean Stalk, selling a valuable instrument like that—"

"No one will know how to use it. For that matter, I doubt if anyone will open it. It locks like a steel chest, and I forgot to throw in the key. But some charlatan will get his money's worth."

"And scare money out of innocent peasants—you soulless creature," said Betty. "I'd like to have heard it work, just for the sake of old times. Did you give the Colonel a demonstration?"

I WAS glad for the talk to drift back to America. Betty's coming to this age was still a mystery to me; but I knew we must have many things in common. From the safe distance of twenty-five centuries we began poking fun at Colonel Milholland.

"The old boy began reading the encyclopedia to me as soon as I dropped in for an interview," I recounted. "He had a passage about a bull moose—its mating season, and such."*

"I suppose he offered to mount an animal for you if you could bring one back from this age?"

"Come to think of it, he did. Though it was his own wall-space he pointed toward. He suggested a bull moose with wide antlers. Don't tell me he

*See footnote page 72.—Ed.

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expected *you* to bring back some big game?"

"You haven't seen me out gunning for moose, have you?" she laughed.

"If anything, vice versa."

"Meaning what?" she asked.

"Meaning that there's a certain bull moose by the name of Jipfur who dwells in a forest called Babylon. If you remember, that encyclopedic article said that in the fall the mating season—"

"I suggest we change the subject," said Betty shortly.

"Very well," I said. "But I'm still in the dark as to why you came here."

"In search of my family," said Betty, a pained note in her voice.

She told me the whole story.

Her father had insisted on being the first to try his own invention. She and her brother were on the roof porch with him, at their Rocky Mountain laboratory, and preparations were almost complete. There were keys provided for any of a hundred different time jumps.

Suddenly Colonel Milholland came out to join them, and in his blundering absent-minded way he dropped a book on the keys.

"Father had warned that the machine would cut clean," Betty said. "The instant the book struck the keys, the big magic hoops swished down from overhead and caught my father just as he was crossing the transfer zone. His head was sliced instantly."

The girls' voice became a tense whisper.

"At once he was gone—all except the tell-tale evidence of the deadly stroke. His left leg had been sliced diagonally below the knee. The severed part lay there, not bleeding. And with it—"

"A part of the head?"

"Yes. A left section of the forehead, with most of the left eyeball, the left cheekbone, part of the nose, mouth, chin—"

"But the rest of his body?"

"Gone—through time—to one of the hundred distant ages."

HER whisper ceased, and there was only the solid, soothing roar of downpouring rain.

"Couldn't you recover the body?" I asked.

"Not a gambler's chance," said Betty with a sigh. Her voice was strong and firm, now, for she had long reconciled herself to the tragedy. "You see, the instant it happened, the Colonel, seeing what he had done, jerked the book off the keys. Which ones he had struck we'll never know."

"No dust marks?"

"We applied the miscroscope without much luck. Finally our best guess was that he had shot backward about twenty-five centuries, which may have been a few hundred years long, or short. Anyhow, when the Colonel, months later, decided to use the time machine for his hobby, my brother agreed to make the passage if the Colonel would send him back twenty-five hundred years."

"Then your brother did come here?"

"Yes—but he accomplished nothing. If father's body came to this age it was either devoured by lions, or buried. No clue was ever found. That was the end of that. For a time my brother squandered his days in nature study, but soon he realized that he had come on a one-way time-ride, so he cast his lot with the patesi who took him in—good old Slaf-Carch."

"Good old Slaf-Carch," I echoed.

"When my brother failed to return," Betty continued, "I suspected that the Colonel wasn't operating the time machine correctly for return trips. I wanted him to call in some scientists,

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but he was too conceited. Besides, we had all of my father's instructions in black and white. So we pondered over them, but they were too deep for me. I had to admit that the Colonel *seemed* to be on the right track, as far as I could tell."

"Then you signed up for a one-way ride, I suppose?"

"Yes. My brother had made me promise not to follow him, but I was desperate, with him and Dad both gone. If they had been swallowed up in thin air, I might as well know the worst."

That was Betty—as nervy as they come. She was strong and adventurous. A girl had to be, to come through the crises she'd faced. A man looks at a beautiful girl and tells himself there's his prize and the campaign's as good as won. But Betty Milholland—well, maybe the man had better think twice, whether his name is Slaf-Carch, or Jipfur—or Hal Norton.

THOSE were my thoughts as she went on with her story. She had reached this age, she said, just in time to talk with her brother before his death. A chariot wheel had cut him down. He had been in Slaf-Carch's service. A band of Assyrian cutthroats had made a surprise attack on Borbel, and the suburb had suffered several casualties.

Betty felt no bitterness toward Slaf-Carch. She was proud that her brother had raillied to the town's defense, and proud that Slaf-Carch had later led a retaliatory expedition—though this latter effort had been ill-fated, having led to Slaf-Carch's own capture and eventual enslavement.

"There," said Betty, darting out of her seriousness, I've given you so much personal data you'll feel like a personal credit corporation. Do I get the loan, or don't I?"

"I think we can arrange a mortgage, Miss Milholland," I said, "On your estimated value of—er—what did Jipfur say you were worth?"

Her joking mood stopped short at the mention of Jipfur. She had heard rumors, she said bitterly, that she wasn't supposed to hear. Jipfur had offered Slaf-Carch a hundred and twenty shekels for her. However, she had been secretly informed that Claf-Carch would never sell her. With that assurance, she had determined to accept her lot as a Babylonian slave.

The rain was over. The clouds opened and a streak of hazy moonlight sifted down on the river. Two wet, ragged creatures came up the river path, black against the graying sky.

As they came closer, I guessed them to be two of the three "Serpents" I had seen a week before. They entered the cavern and melted into the blackness of the wall opposite us.

I do not know whether they could see us. They talked in hushed tones, then fell silent.

"It's nearly dawn," Betty whispered. "I must get back."

"I've been living for the past eighteen months for this talk with you," I said. "But now that a couple ragamuffins have intruded on our date, how about making it again soon?"

"We don't dare risk seeing each other often," said Betty, "except as we happen to meet in the line of duty. But under the surface of convention we'll know that we're—friends."

I suggested that she might use a stronger word than "friends." After all, we had everything in common—

But my delusions about falling in love were instantly derailed.

"HAL, if were back in our own century," Betty said, with a frankness that was dizzying, "you're the sort

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of fellow I might fall for without half trying. But we'd better face the facts. We're stuck here—five hundred and fifty B. C. Whatever we've been brought up to believe is right or wrong, the right thing in this age is for us to submit to the ways of Babylonian slaves."

"You don't mean that you'll go through with all the ghastly obligations?"

"Hal, don't misunderstand me. I'm not considering my own desires. Slaf-Carch is a great man among his fellow men. He's wealthy, he's honest, he's respected for what he is. His slaves are proud to have him for a master. And in this civilization every female slave who comes into womanhood is proud to bear children for her master."

"Betty!" The hard gasp that escaped my lips caused the ragged creatures who were sharing our cave to stir uneasily. They had been so quiet, after shaking off their soaked outer garments and settling down, that I had forgotten them.

"S-s-sh!" said Betty. "You'll wake our chaperons."

"But what you were saying, Betty—it's outlandish. I can't believe that a swell girl like you—"

"I am Slaf-Carch's property." Again her voice was low, impassionate. "I've gone through weeks of mental torture to bring myself to that realization. But I've come to a decision—the only decision possible in these times. You mustn't shatter it, Hal. I am subject to the Babylonian property laws. Within a few days, when Slaf-Carch calls for me, I will come."

"All right," I said finally, and my words came forth bitterly. "We understand each other."

"I know you'll hate me, Hal, because you haven't begun to live in these times."

"I'd take a train for home this minute if I could," I said.

"Without any farewells, no doubt." Betty rose to go.

"One question, Betty." I must have stood challengingly in her path, for her starlit eyes searched me curiously.

"If Jipfur buys you, as I'm sure he means to do—"

"Hal! Don't say it!"

"Jipfur is handsome," I said icily. "He's hot-tempered and he's masterful. Personally I think he's conceited, and I know he's a coward. But that's beside the point."

"What is the point?"

"That there'll be more than slave customs and economic arrangements involved when Jipfur buys you."

Betty's face turned away from me. She looked anxiously at the gray streak spreading across the horizon, at the velvet shadows across the broad black river.

"If he buys me, I may obey—or I may come to this river—"

She gave a little sigh, then tried to fling her troubled thoughts away with a toss of her braided tresses. She led the way out of the cave, dropping some comical remarks about our chaperons, the tattered rascals who lay in a snoring heap not twenty feet from where we had been sitting.

CURIOUSLY there were three of them now, the third one being the huge deformed member of the Serpent Trio, looking no less repulsive than a week before.

"That third fellow must have been here already," said Betty, "only it was so dark when we entered the cave we couldn't see him."

"I hope he was asleep, considering all we've been saying," I said. "Or have we been talking any Babylonian?"

"Mostly English, I think," said

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Betty.

We took off our sandals to wade through the mud holes along the lane. Betty was a carefree child again, chasing along beside me, laughing with glee as the mud squashed up through her toes.

But I was weighed down with the heaviest mood of a lifetime. The torment that Betty had fought through was now mine to fight.

Daylight was fast approaching by the time we reached the crossroads. Each of us would have to hurry to get back undiscovered. But I had to have my final say, and it wasn't an easy job.

"Thanks for all you've told me, Betty," I said. "There's not much I can do. But I know how you feel about Jipfur, so count on me. I'm fighting on your side, and I'll give my right arm rather than let Slaf-Carch sell you."

"Hal—"

Whatever she meant to say evidently couldn't be said in words, for she looked up at me with serious trusting eyes, caught my shoulders with her hands, kissed me.

For a long moment we kissed. Then we parted.

CHAPTER IV

AT HIGH noon two days later a parade formed in the scanty shade of the park that surrounded Jipfur's palace.

Kish and I were near the front of the parade, resplendent in our fancy gold and green uniforms, riding the backs of a handsome team hitched to the first chariot.

We were merely ornaments, of course, dressed to match the gold and green harness of the horses. But we had a right to feel important, nevertheless, because our chariot was occupied by Jipfur's haughty sister and her two ladies-in-waiting.

But Kish didn't feel important. He wouldn't have shared Jipfur's artificial self-glorification if he'd been dressed in pure gold. He was cynical about pomp and ceremony anyway, and doubly so when instigated by Jipfur.

"It smells like rotten figs to me," Kish kept whispering to me on the sly. "Why should he put on all this public show for a man he tries to cheat in private?"

Jipfur led the parade, needless to say. We lumbered into action, following him straight through the heart of the city.

I must admit that Jipfur had the appearance of a man born to ride at the head of a parade. The pose of his somewhat pudgy head, the bearing of his slightly stocky shoulders, the proud lift of his arms as he held the reins of his horse, gave him an aspect of supreme grandeur fully as convincing as his magnificent regalia.

His costume was a mixture of the ceremonial uniform of a devout patesi and the gleaming armor of a warrior. He wore the priest's tall cone-shaped cap, specially ornamented with a band of carved gold. This band blended effectively with his tawny forehead, bestowing a golden quality upon his handsome thick-set face.

"The bull moose!" I chuckled to myself. Two locks of black hair spiralled out from under his conical cap like a mountain goat's horns. If Betty had been here I would have pointed them out as antlers.

The crowds closed in around us as we entered the market streets. Here and there a pompous merchant shouted at a lackey to fetch his chariot or his riding horse so that he could join the procession. All manner of men joined us, from bankers to vagabonds. Before we came within sight of the king's

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palace, street crowds and paraders were all rolled into the same snowball. The rumor that there would be feasting at the end of the march did nothing to lessen the parade's popularity.

BEYOND the king's palace Jipfur called a halt and made a speech. In the shadow of the great ziggurat he made another. And when we reached the city's gates, by now a crowd of fully five thousand, Jipfur made the most eloquent speech of all. He appeared completely convinced of his own big-heartedness in instigating this celebration.

"Our beloved Slaf-Carch will be the most surprised patesi in the valley when we pour in upon him to do him honors," Jipfur shouted grandly, and the wobble of his tall cone-shaped cap kept pace with his gesturing arms. "But Slaf-Carch deserves our honors. He is a great man and a great patriot!"

Everybody cheered, and the inevitable riff-raff made noises on all manner of cymbals and noise-beaters.

"No one has missed Slaf-Carch more than I during his long absence. I do not refer to the fact that the care of all of his property burdened me with heavy responsibilities. I refer to that affection which every man holds for his fellow countrymen. I knew that Slaf-Carch was not dead. The gods told me so. That is why I sent out expedition after expedition to make forays among the nomads—with what result? At last, by the grace of Marduk, acting through me, his faithful servant, Slaf-Carch has been recovered."

Another pandemonium of noise and cheering.

"And so, fellow men," Jipfur concluded, "let us march on to Borbel and surprise our esteemed patesi and patriot by entering his palace singing his praises."

On we marched, and thousands of lusty throats among us gave out with thundering anthems whose weird and freakish melodies I took to denote abounding joy. Even the two aristocratic ladies-in-waiting who accompanied Jipfur's sister must have been singing; the squeaking chariot wheels couldn't have made all the shrill sounds from that vicinity.

Within two miles of Borbel a pair of messengers raced ahead to be sure the way was clear. They didn't race back. As we entered Borbel and approached Slaf-Carch's palace we still saw nothing of the messengers.

There was a crowd of people milling among the glazed blue columns at the entrance. They must have seen us coming, but they didn't come out to greet us.

This was strange. We couldn't understand it. Our hilarious spirits suffered a mysterious chill, we slackened our pace, then stopped. Jipfur commanded us to wait and he rode up to the palace entrance alone.

For several minutes he seemed to be carrying on an earnest conversation with the group of peasants and slaves. Finally he rode back to us, and there was deep trouble in his face. He lifted his arms to silence the low murmur of voices, then addressed us in leaden tones.

"Bow your heads. The gods be with us while I tell you the awful thing that has happened. This morning Slaf-Carch was missing. No one knew where he had gone. The palace was searched, but there was no sign that he had planned to depart."

Jipfur paused, mopped the perspiration from his golden forehead, took a deep breath, and continued.

"But he has been found. Even as we were approaching this village, three of Slaf-Carch's slaves, searching for him in the garden, came upon his body.

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Slaf-Carch has been cruelly murdered."

The groan that swept over the five thousand paraders was like an avalanche.

Jipfur waited for silence, then added a few words of dismissal to the shocked holiday crowd. It was all anyone could have done under the circumstances.

"If there is any further word concerning the cause of this ghastly deed, that word will be brought to you in Babylon. But as we all know, Slaf-Carch had no enemies. This very multitude testifies to the fact that all men paid him honor and respect. There is no more that any of you can do. Return to your homes, and when it is time for the burial rites we will gather at the Cave of Tombs.". . .

TWO days later I attended Slaf-Carch's funeral.

The parade of honor had been vast, but it was nothing compared to this gathering. Fully fifteen thousand people swarmed the rocky hillsides, and you could hear the low-whispered praises for the deceased all about you. Not the cheap and shoddy kind, like cheers and noise-makings of a mob stirred by a speech, but the deep-felt praises that have been earned by kindness and fair dealing.

Kish and I stood at the service of Jipfur and his family of mourners during the ceremony. The afternoon shadows spread over us and we could see the thousands of faces gathered close around the mouth of the yellow rock cavern. I searched those faces until I spotted Betty.

There were no signs of weeping in her strong face, but I saw that she could not bear to look at me.

Many a patesi, including Jipfur, said words over the body. Jipfur's egotism was somewhat tempered, for once; but I couldn't help noticing that his eyes were furtive as if casting about to gauge the dramatic effect of his stoutly uttered prayers and tributes.

Everyone, of course, would remember the bruised and partially crushed face of Slaf-Carch. He had been stoned to death. That was all his dazed, shocked mourners knew; perhaps all they would ever know, I thought.

After the body had been sealed in its prepared niche deep within the yellow rock cave, a signal from a patesi indicated that the ceremony was at an end. And yet for a moment the multitude waited, motionless, as if reluctant to break the spell of its own silent tribute to Slaf-Carch.

Suddenly a voice sounded from the yellow rock cave.

"My people, I have witnessed your grief for me on this day."

It was a rich, resonant baritone voice, ringing strong and clear, as if amplified by the cavern walls. *It was the voice of Slaf-Carch.*

Kish's fingers dug into my arm. He gasped.

"What was that?"

EVERYONE who heard the voice was asking the same thing. The mourners turned to each other aghast. There was no mistaking that voice.

The throngs too far back to know what had happened began to crowd closer. What was the meaning of all this gasping, these frightened faces, this statue-like tension?

Suddenly the voice came again.

"My people, you have been outraged by the dastardly crime committed against me. Then let me say to you, *the man who murdered me is among you.*"

My suspicions were blow-torching in Betty's direction by this time. I glared at her. She didn't see me. Like a few hundred others she appeared to be in

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a frenzy.

Panic-stricken persons broke out of their nightmarish freezes and began scurrying away, glancing back through eyes of terror. But at this moment Betty caught the sleeve of a patesi, whispered something in his ear. He nodded eagerly, called three other men of importance into the huddle, swiftly convinced them of something.

Immediately one of these men began to call to the turbulent crowd. "Listen to me!"

He mounted a rock and succeeded in gesturing the restless horde to peace.

"What we have heard was the voice of Slaf-Carch."

The people glanced to the cave and back to the speaker. No one thought of disagreeing.

"Slaf-Carch is living on," the speaker continued, "in a manner that we cannot understand. *It's the old legend—"*

There were rumblings of dissension. But once more the rich baritone voice vibrated through the walls of the yellow rock cave.

"I have looked upon the river—many, many times. In my own way I shall continue to live among you. Go, now, and remember what I have said."

That was that. The speaker who had mounted the rock simply gestured toward the cave. Nothing more was needed. The people murmured with wonderment, telling each other that they had always believed that legend, but here, at last, was a living proof.

At once they grew excited over the prospects of Slaf-Carch's new existence. He had been murdered, but he was still living, in his own way—and *he knew his murderer.*

The snap of fingers brought Kish and me to attention.

"Return to Borbel at once," came Jipfur's brittle command. "Inform the palace that I shall come this evening to assume possession of all properties, including lands, slaves, and livestock."

CHAPTER V

NOBODY but a sap would walk around all week with a sharp tack in the heel of his shoe, prodding him at every step. But that's practically what I did—only in my case the tack was in the heel of my brain, and the pain throbbed even when I was supposed to be sleeping.

In other words, the steel-sharp memory of what Betty had said she'd do in case she fell to Jipfur—namely, consider throwing herself into the Euphrates—was driving me wild.

And the worst of it was, I couldn't do a thing about it. I was Jipfur's slave, as never before, and do you think he kept me on the hop? With all of his new business to look after, he was loading every competent slave to the limit with new responsibilities.

A few weeks earlier, when Slaf-Carch was still in there pitching for me, I congratulated myself that he'd made Jipfur give me a white-collar job. Now I began to envy the strong-backed lads and lassies who worked the *shadufs* for the irrigation streams. At least they got to rest while their buckets filled.

I tried my best, but I couldn't manage to break away for a jaunt to Borbel. I needed a talk with Betty worse than I needed food or drink. What's more, I was burning up for a chance to examine the scene of Slaf-Carch's murder—for, as Kish said, that deal had the smell of rotten figs.

Of course Jipfur's guards, together with the king's law-enforcement agents, were on the job. But they failed to unearth any murderer. Rumor was that they had questioned several night prowlers, including the Three Serpents, on general principles. But their in-

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vestigation came to nothing.

One afternoon Kish stopped by to tell me he had cleared the inner palace garden for a unique occasion. Several slaves inherited from Slaf-Carch had just arrived. Jipfur would interview them this evening and assign them to their places.

"I shall be conducting the slaves to the inner garden as Jipfur calls for them," Kish said, lifting his eyebrow significantly. "If anything of interest comes along I'll let you know."

My work suffered the rest of that afternoon. The only thing of importance that I accomplished was to sharpen a small iron knife.

IT WAS nearly sundown when Kish came scurrying past my room to whistle a signal. I dropped my work and slipped up a narrow stairs to the inner garden balcony.

I looked down on the luxurious scene Jipfur had chosen for his interviews. Long shadows from the evening sun painted broad stripes across the inclosed garden. The fountain under the open sky sprayed thin streams of liquid gold —which meant that somewhere under the garden promenade, where tunnels were hidden, slaves were carrying buckets of water to replenish the fountain reservoir.

Jipfur was the picture of leisure, lying on a red brocaded lounge, his cone-shaped cap pushed well back on his broad handsome head, his pudgy fingers idly counting the tassel strings of his gold and white robe.

He was facing the fountain in the center of the court, and I didn't intend letting him know that I was eavesdropping from a point almost directly above him.

Then came the dreaded but inevitable entrance. Betty was conducted into Jipfur's presence. The patesi suavely asked her to sit down, and he dismissed Kish.

A moment later Kish tiptoed along the balcony to join me.

"She's just a child," Kish whispered.

"Jipfur doesn't think so," I retorted.

It was plain, from Jipfur's talk, however, that he was annoyed at her for coming in braids and a simple slave-girl dress. He had expected her to be adorned in something charming for this occasion.

Of course Jipfur didn't guess that she had applied her skillful arts of make-up to accentuate this juvenile effect. I caught this at once; but I also saw that, in spite of her efforts, Betty was nonetheless breathtakingly beautiful.

"I'll pardon you for your appearance this time," said Jipfur. "You've spent too many days in field work. After you get used to indoor work and learn a few manners you'll be worth all of six shekels."

Jipfur laughed at his joke, but Betty didn't see anything funny, and neither did I. I was right at the edge of the rail, feeling like a bomb about to drop. But I hadn't realized, until Kish whispered, "Better put that away," that I had drawn my iron knife from my pocket.

Now our lord and master was urging Betty to come closer. She quietly refused, and a flame of ill-temper reddened Jipfur's face. He rose to his feet, began to pace before her.

Again Kish placed a restraining hand on my arm.

"I'd better take that knife," he whispered.

I shook my head. The scared look in Kish's face didn't deter me. I was too intent upon Jipfur, whose every word and action was shooting my eyes through with red. The damned bull moose was flaunting his authority in the manner that was nothing short of

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bestial. I intended to do something.

BETTY kept eluding him with cunning evasions. But Jipfur was the master. The weight of all Babylonian law was back of him. He drove his advantage with the finesse of a skilled executioner.

I crouched, trembling. No matter that this would be the end of me. The thing was to make my leap true, and make an end of Jipfur. Betty would be certain to fall into safer hands.

I glanced back of me. Kish was gone. That was just as well. No need for him to be dragged into this crime as an accomplice.

Now I was barely clinging to the balcony edge, gauging the twenty-foot drop. Jipfur had caught Betty's hands, was trying to draw her into an embrace. The terror in her eyes was awful to see—worse because it was touched with a hint of resignation to her inevitable fate.

Then she caught sight of me, knew that I was about to jump. Instantly she cried out—*in English!*

"Don't do it! Don't do it!"

Jipfur let go one of her hands, whirling to see whether there was an intruder. Momentarily I jumped back out of sight. Then a booming voice sounded from out of nowhere—the rich baritone of Slaf-Carch.

"Jipfur . . . Jipfur . . . I am speaking to you."

The power of that voice was no less than it had been at the Cave of Tombs. I sank to my knees, still clutching the iron knife, and bent to the rail's edge to see—

Jipfur stood in his tracks, open-mouthed. Beads of perspiration showed at the edges of his black wavy hair.

The voice came again.

"Jipfur, have you everything you want now? Have you?"

Jipfur, turning dizzily, stammered an answer. He didn't want anything. He hadn't asked for this new inheritance.

"Have you everything you want, Jipfur?" The voice repeated.

Jipfur snarled. "Why all these questions? Are you accusing me—"

"Careful, Jipfur. People may be listening. Unless you mean to confess—"

"I've nothing to confess. Get away. Quit hounding me. I don't believe in you."

"Do you believe in yourself, Jipfur? Who was it that shouted to the parade, 'Slaf-Carch is a man of great honor'? Have you forgotten your eloquence so soon?"

"Go away! Leave me alone!"

"Very well. I will leave you—for a price."

"Price?"

"Give Betty another year of freedom."

"Another year!" Jipfur roared. "That's ridiculous. *This is the fall—*"

"There will be another fall, Jipfur."

OUT of anguished eyes, Jipfur stared at Betty, as if trying to convince himself she hadn't heard. But she nodded to him, and a faint smile of victory touched her lips. Slowly she backed away from him and fled from the court. . . .

Kish and I threaded our way, that midnight, by the light of the stars to the Cave of Tombs.

Kish had heard the conversation between Slaf-Carch's voice and Jipfur, and somehow it got him worse than before. The first time he had excused as a sort of mass delusion. But now he was convinced that Slaf-Carch couldn't be dead. Nothing would do but we have a look in the cave of the dead to prove it.

My own nerves, I must admit, were considerably joggled. This midnight jaunt to the Cave of Tombs wasn't what my twentieth-century physician

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would have prescribed for one in my chaotic state of mind. Kish, however, expressed wonder that I could be so calm and collected, and demanded to know whether I had some insight. I evaded his question.

We began jabbing at the sealed door with our heavy metal tools—about three jabs apiece. What stopped us was Slaf-Carch's voice.

"Why dig for me? You saw my crushed body laid away."

Kish gulped hard. "I—I can't understand. That foolish legend—"

"Believe it," said the voice. "That will be simplest. And now—a word to both of you—about Jipfur. Watch him, but serve him, *with vision*. Now go."

If I had had a flashlight I would have combed those jagged rocks and put my curiosity at rest then and there. But Kish had already bounded off at the word go.

It was good to be out in the fresh night air again, and we moved along at a good pace. It was what our pent-up nerves needed.

I suggested that we take advantage of the moonless night to swing around by way of Borbel. Kish was willing. He was an understanding cuss, no less so for his cynicism, and he hit the nail on the head when he said, "Anything to postpone crawling back under Jipfur's thumb."

I pondered his remark as we hiked along through the blackness. Unquestionably there would be an electric tension in the air every time I entered Jipfur's presence from now on, for I was potentially his murderer. Except for Betty's outcry, and the diverting intrusion of Slaf-Carch's mystic voice, I would have earned a one-way ticket into a fiery furnace.

NOW there was a shadowy form ahead of us, moving along the crest of the hillside. We overtook it, or rather, her, for there was just enough starlight to reveal—Betty!

"I thought so," I said accusingly. "Something told me you were out here in this midnight wilderness."

"I was sent back to Borbel," said Betty, "but there was no use trying to sleep after that horrifying fracas with Jipfur."

"We've been at Slaf-Carchs' grave," said Kish. "He spoke to us again."

"Oh?" Betty seemed curious to hear all about it. When Kish finished, she commented, "Now, at least, you will believe the legend."

"Personally, I'm not so dense," I said skeptically. "But sooner or later, Betty, you'll need a new *electric battery*." I borrowed some words from English to finish my sentence.

She turned her starlit face toward me blankly. "I don't know what you're talking about, Hal."

"You're very clever," I said.

"Indeed you are," Kish added, missing my point completely. "The way you defended yourself against Jipfur—"

"Kish," said Betty in a low earnest voice, "you heard Slaf-Carch's voice, the same as I did? And you, Hal? . . . Did you catch the implication? *Jipfur murdered Slaf-Carch*. There was no other possible interpretation—"

"Not so fast, Betty," I warned. "Maybe that voice doesn't know. Maybe it was just guessing."

"But that voice is Slaf-Carch—his spiritual self, still alive—"

I sputtered and gasped for air. Was she pulling the wool over my eyes? This was exasperating.

"We've got to keep this confidential—the three of us," she went on. "The danger is far greater than you think. The rumor is already rampant among the slaves that Jipfur is guilty."

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"If I did this deed, strike me dead . . . !"

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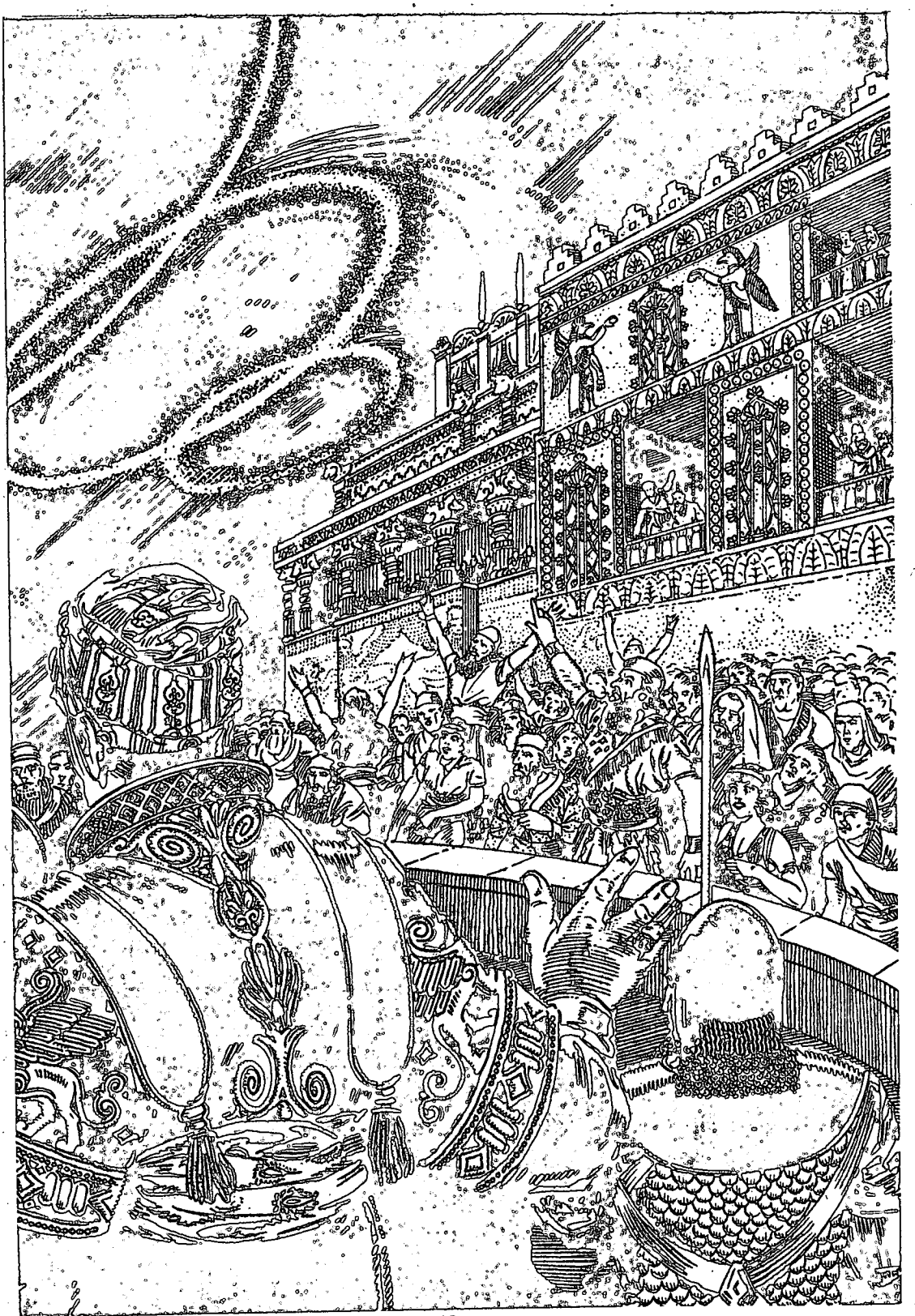

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"What?" said Kish. "So soon? It was only this evening that—"

"I didn't start the rumor," said Betty. "But that's exactly what Jipfur will think if he learns that the slaves held a mass meeting—"

"*Meeting?* When? Where?"

The three of us stopped and Betty pointed back to the hillside trail over which we had come. "That's where I've been she said. "There were hundreds of slaves gathered in the darkness. I didn't get close enough to make myself known, and I left early. A group like that is sure to be full of spies."

"The Serpents were there, no doubt," said Kish. "They're Jipfur's information agents and high-pressure men."

BETTY said that the meeting didn't promise any action, but everyone agreed that Jipfur was the only man who stood to gain by Slaf-Carch's murder. Everyone aired his grievances against Jipfur but no one could see any chance for a rebellion.

"The peasants were there, too," she said, "and they complained of oppressive taxes that they were frightened into paying—"

"By the Serpents," said Kish. "Those peasants are so superstitious that any fake magician can intimidate them."

"All in all," said Betty, "the people are in a fighting mood. It spells trouble ahead for a certain headstrong young patesi named Jipfur."

Kish and I escorted Betty to Borbel and hied ourselves on to Babylon before daybreak. We entered the palace separately, hoping to escape notice.

I had just closed the heavy wooden door of my room when a knock sounded. A guard escorted me to Jipfur's council room.

Jipfur sat at the head of the ebony table between yellow candles, looking sleepless and worried. Three or four of his advisers were talking with him as I entered. He scowled from under his towsled black hair and barked at me.

"Hal, your position as patesi's attendant has ended. The troubles are cropping up too fast in the complaint department, and so—"

He paused for a draft of air through his thick lips. I stared at him, thinking how his thick, handsome face would have looked if I had plunged that knife in his back.

"Since you were a protege of Slaf-Carch," he said, "I hereby promote you to the rank of Minister. You begin work tomorrow."

CHAPTER VI

RUMORS swept through Babylon like a devastating sandstorm: Slaves and peasants who had been loyal workers for Slaf-Carch were harboring angry suspicions. *They were holding secret meetings.*

This news sifted through the glazed hallways of Jipfur's palace with the chill of an oncoming blizzard.

Jipfur called the Serpents in for a session behind closed doors. The business end of the palace became a chaos of conferences—some with bankers and merchants—some with military guards —some with alley rats. The magnificent Jipfur was in a jam, and he reached out for moral support in all directions. He doubled his military guard. He increased his Serpent gang from three to six.

Meanwhile I took over the duties of Minister of Complaints, a job that was ninety-nine percent hot water. My appointment was a clever maneuver on Jipfurs' part, aimed to quiet the complaints of Slaf-Carch's old followers. For it was well known that "Hal, the young foreigner" had stood in good stead with Slaf-Carch.

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But I had no panacea for the growing unrest. I could feel trouble coming on. It came—a year of it—in a series of roaring avalanches.

Jipfur spent six violent weeks reorganizing, and among other changes he was forced to appoint two additional clean-up men to take care of his own offices. They were needed to scoop up the thousands of clay tablets that he smashed all over the floors. Tablets were pulverized by the ton in his constant shifting of business deals and countermanding of orders.

Jipfur, I soon realized, was on the ragged edge of cracking up.

My new office, located in the business end of the palace, gave me an inside track on his affairs. He was at once the most interesting and the most perturbing case of human explosion I ever witnessed.

Back of it all was Slaf-Carch's mysterious voice. Whether it spoke to him daily or only at rare intervals no one knew. But all the wealth and power in Babylon can't soothe a man if he thinks that the uncle he murdered is watching over his shoulder, waiting for a chance to vociferously bawl him out in public.

Besides the hot coals of guilt that scorched the bull moose's backbone, there was the stab of defeat through his heart—assuming he had a heart. Temporarily he had lost Betty. And I'll never forget the volcano of rage that roared out of his office that morning when his aristocratic sister dropped in to ask him why he had postponed assigning the yellow-haired slave wench, and then tried to kid him about it.

"There will be another fall, Jipfur," the voice of Slaf-Carch had said.

Those words were the torch that lighted Jipfur's mind—the blowtorch that ignited his actions during the year's seasons that followed.

ACROSS a ten-foot patch of palace wall a clay calendar was built. This was Jipfur's crafty device for impressing Betty with his lustful will. He transferred her from Borbel to this palace, presented her with a dainty brass hatchet, and commanded that she chop out a number from the clay calendar for every day that passed.

The ring of the little brass hatchet would frequently bring Jipfur striding out to the calendar, smiling arrogantly at her, gloating that time was marching on. Another fall would come.

This daily exercise became the bane of Betty's existence.

"I could sink that hatchet in his dizzy skull," she confided to Kish and me.

Kish and I breakfasted with Betty these days. Our threesome, wedged into the morning's schedule before the big shots were up, was the bright spot of the day. Betty said it was all that kept her courage up.

Nominally, her job was to manage the table service for Jipfur, his sister, and their clique of dignitaries—and to take care of the calendar.

But her knowledge of diet and her skill at preparing unheard-of dishes soon won for her the enviable position of Supervisor of Culinary Arts.

"You're both coming up in the Babylonian world," Kish remarked.

"And why not?" I commented. "We may be foreigners, but Betty's heart and soul are right here in Babylon—"

"No!" Betty exclaimed. "I want to go back home!"

"Home?" I said, in blank surprise at her outburst. "Do you mean Borbel?"

"I mean home," she said. "My own land—my own times!"

I stared at her in amazement. She suddenly gave way to tears.

I couldn't have been any more surprised if Slaf-Carch had whispered in my ears. There she sat sobbing, like a

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child. At this moment she *was* a child.

NEITHER Kish nor I knew how to handle an emergency of this kind, but Kish quickly excused himself, and I sort of brushed her eyes with my handkerchief. Then my arms were around her and I was kissing her.

That moment would have cost me a visit to the lions' dens if Jipfur had burst in on us. But he didn't, thank Marduk and all the little gods! And so, out of that unfinished breakfast, came a new understanding—and for a short moment a new plan of action.

"Betty, if I just had a timetable of the return trips, we'd get aboard the first train."

I shouldn't have said it, for I only brought back the hopelessness of our situation more cruelly. But then and there Betty told me something that offered a tiny clue—not what you'd call a floodlight of hope, but a spark.

The time device had appeared before her eyes once—possibly twice—since she had been stranded here. It had happened two years ago—she had seen the hoops of light flash down on a hilltop. And again, not so many months in the past, she had seen a midnight flash descend to the top of the Tower-of-Babel ziggurat that *might* have been—

"The rule, you know," she said, "was that the time device would seek out the highest points of a landscape."

"I've no doubt the thing has hopped all over the Fertile Crescent. But how we're going to know when and where—"

"It's really quite impossible," she said. "I needn't have mentioned it."

And with that our spark of hope burnt out. We scarcely mentioned the matter again, though Betty once alluded to her momentary weakness as a silly fear that she might get appendicitis or have to have a tooth pulled—and she hated Babylonian doctors. But concerning her real fear—the growing terror of Jipfur—she said not a word.

There was one thing that I knew to do, and I did it.

My new position ranked me high above the common slave I had once been, and invested me with the authority to employ personal servants. I handpicked a dozen men, gave them a clear description of the luminous time hoops that might come out of the sky—much to their bewilderment—and stationed them on hilltops and ziggurats to keep watch, maintaining day and night shifts.

From month to month I checked up on them, rewarding the alert ones, discharging the indolent. At last I had a faithful staff who understood what was wanted. Years might pass, but if ever the time hoops began to strike in this vicinity, these men would break their necks to get word to me.

Betty had a case of homesickness that was pitiful to see. Perhaps it all stemmed from her fear of Jipfur. Every new square she chopped off the calendar sharpened her dread of Babylon, quickened her hopes of going back "home."

ON THE day we secretly designated as Christmas she was deep in the blues. For three years she'd passed Christmas without giving it a thought—a natural thing, considering that the first Christmas was still five and a half centuries in the future.

But this time nostalgia had her in its morbid grip, and she couldn't free herself until she resolved to do something about it—something to express good will—even to her worst enemies—in the old familiar Christmas spirit.

I had a bright idea that we give gifts, and I went to no end of trouble to fix up something very special. Out of the best metals and chemicals I could bring to-

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gether I constructed a small but powerful dry cell battery—one that would fit the vocoder. (I thought it was high time for the ghost of Slaf-Carch to break his long silence!) Imagine my consternation, a week after "Christmas," to discover that Betty had emptied half of the battery's contents and was trying to grow a hothouse flower in it.

She gave Kish and me each an ivory comb—really fine gifts for these times. She bestowed trinkets on several of her palace friends. But most oddly, she took great pains in carving a small neck ornament for Jipfur. From a thin sheet of brass she made a chain of letters that spelled "Bull Moose." Of course only she and I knew the meaning of the ornament, though we tried to share the joke with Kish.

From then on Jipfur always wore the neck piece, though ignorant of its meaning. It was comical to see him try to restrain his immense pride. He was so sure this signified a growing bond of love between him and his yellow-haired slave girl that Betty suffered weeks of bitter regret for her overflow of good will.

Rumors began to fly. It was quite possible, by Babylonian law, for a girl to be lifted out of slavery if any free man cared to marry her. Perhaps Jipfur had postponed his assignment of the yellow-haired foreign girl last fall for a very special reason!

The more I heard of this talk the more anxious I was to see the red flash of time-hoops.

THERE was just enough winter in this semitropical valley for the more savage side of civilization to hibernate. But the warm winds of planting time soon unleashed the furies of Babylon's pent-up frictions.

A storm of distressing news swept into our palace. There was talk that Jipfur's Borbel estate was slipping out of his control, that many of Slaf-Carch's old slaves were getting out of hand.

And there was stronger talk—whispering that Jipfur had never washed the bloodstains from his hands, and the gods were growing angry.

Even his staunchest friends who had shouted his innocence from the housetops admitted that he had been criminally negligent about the matter. He should have at least forced a conviction and execution upon some promising suspect.

These gruesome suggestions, I am sure, took root in Jipfur's imagination. The evidence cropped up unexpectedly one morning.

It was one of those dismal mornings with slow rain dripping rhythmically along the arcade of the inner garden. Betty and Kish and I had agreed at breakfast that nothing ever happened on a day like this.

What might have happened, an hour later, if I hadn't chanced to walk past the library, will never be known. Crossing through this secluded corner of the palace I heard a clatter of clay tablets. I rushed in. Strangely there were no candles burning—the only light filtered through the closely packed shelves of Babylonian literature along the narrow windows.

Jipfur stood squarely before the shelves with a sturdy shepherd's crook in his hands. He was using the crook-end on the stacks of clay tablets, jerking them down. A heap of them were broken on the floor, and out of that heap came a painful groan.

"Kish!" I cried.

Jipfur whirled on me, swung the shepherd's crook at my head. I ducked. The thing struck the wall and more plates of clay clattered to the floor.

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Before I could catch any meaning out of this mad turmoil, Jipfur was bouncing tablets off my head and I was rushing him with fists. A missile cut me across the forehead and for an instant I thought I would join Kish and the rubbish heap on the floor. I sank for a count of three—my hand closed over a four pound slab of dried clay—my fingertips caught it up by its fancy cuneiform indentations—my arm let it fly.

That tablet may have been the Code of Hammurabi, for all I know. If it was, I broke the law. I broke it over the bull moose's brawny elbow. He yowled with pain.

"Guards! Guards!" he shrieked, and he waved his hands so defenselessly that I stopped my attack. "Guards! Guards!"

KISH stopped groaning, shook off a quarter-ton of debris and raised his head. One eye was swollen shut, the other was wide open.

"Yes! Call the guards!" Kish's choked voice was bitter, mocking. "Call the guards. Tell them what happened."

Jipfur's face was strange to see. It was a study in terror. Jipfur, the mighty patesi, the man of wealth, the patriot with the big voice, the leader of parades! He clutched the shelf with quivering hands, his white lips trembled.

"I'm sick!" he hissed.

Heavy footsteps were pounding toward us. The guards were coming on a run. On the instant Jipfur sprang toward a certain object near the door—a fresh, soft clay tablet still gleaming with moisture. He hurled it to the floor, stamped on it with his sandals to obliterate the writing.

In came a squad of guards, puffing and snarling, ready with battle axes. What was the matter? Had there been a fight?

"Did someone attack you, your honor?"

Jipfur's eyes turned to Kish, slowly, calculating the delicate balance of advantages.

"There has been a trifling accident, men," he said in an unruffled voice. "Help that poor fellow up."

Kish was nearer dead than alive as two of the guards led him away. But he distinctly echoed the word, "Accident!" under his breath—and it was not a kindly echo.

As for the bull moose, he now lapsed into the luxury of raving and ranting like a mad man.

"I'm sick! I'm sick! Take me to my bed and let the gods have mercy on me. These crashing walls have struck a dreadful malady through my bones."

They led him away, and the whole palace spent the rest of the week praying for him—at his command.

Personally, I had no fear about his pulling through. His injuries amounted to no more than a cracked elbow and some bruises. There would have been a cracked skull if I had had more time. But he had taken such a quick escape to mock-illness that my good work had been cut short.

Babylon gossip took his story at face value, namely that the rain had loosened the library walls and caused his stores of tablets to fall on himself and his attendant.

But Kish had another story for Betty and me, as he lay bandaged, fighting death.

The rain, he said, had played its part, but in a different way. A high pile of clay tablets might have killed him instantly. But the dampness stuck some of them and bungled the patesi's neat plan.

"I caught a glimpse of that freshly written document," said Kish, referring

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to the wet tablet that the bull moose had so hastily stamped out. "It bore my seal—Jipfur had faked it—and it confessed that I had murdered Slaf-Carch to give my dear master more wealth. Now the painful memory of the deed drove me to take my own life."

"Your dear master!" Betty said with a saccharine whine. "He'd better not know that *you* know."

"He knows," said Kish weakly. "He has warned me that if I breathe a word to anyone, he'll cut my heart out."

CHAPTER VII

"GET me a new doctor!"

That, as the newscasts of Babylon went, was the quotation of the week. Friends would meet on the streets of Babylon and inquire about each other's health, and their wives' health, and the king's health. When they got around to a certain wealthy young patesi's health the conversation picked up interest.

"I hear he called in three new physicians."

"Three! He had all of twelve. He's calling doctors from all corners of the land. I think he's *crazy*."

"I think he's *guilty*."

And then the conversation would hush down, for it didn't become common people to make charges that they didn't have the money to prove.

Kish absorbed all the antiseptic that Betty and I could concoct, and finally got back on his feet.

Jipfur, meanwhile, grew steadily worse.

On the day that I led Kish in for a visit, the bull moose was carrying on like a maniac. His attendants couldn't quiet him.

"If you came in to accuse me, get out!" he would roar.

"We didn't," said Kish mildly. "We came to see how you were."

"You can't tell me I was in the garden that night," the bull moose went on. "There was no one in that garden. Old Slaf-Carch stoned himself to death, that's what happened."

The doctor tried to soothe him. "No one's accusing you. Stop making worries for yourself. Take some of these herbs—"

"Marduk strike fire through your herbs!" Jipfur would shout. "I don't want medicine. I want the hot flames removed from my head."

The doctors couldn't work with him.

That day Jipfur took a strange notion that men of magic might help. He ordered me to ride forth and find the Serpents. Not the last three, for they knew no magic; they were nothing but artists at badgering and threatening.

"Find my first two Serpents. Yes, and that hunch-backed Third. We'll see whether their magic is good. Bring each of them here—by force if necessary."

Outside the palace I was at the mercy of the motley street crowds. The hard feelings toward Jipfur would surely be hurled at me. I expected to be mobbed and lynched.

But my reputation ran ahead of me—I was the pale-faced young foreigner that Slaf-Carch had befriended. I must be left unharmed.

I SPENT three days chariot-cruising through farms on the Borbel side of Babylonia. I picked up the trail of the First Serpent several times, but failed to find him.

The Second Serpent walked into my path and I carted him back to the palace. In all his rags and filth he pranced into Jipfur's presence with an outlandish air of showmanship. He got out a bagful of magic boxes and colored feathers, and uncorked a rigmarole of

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incantations to unheard of gods, changing his facial mask with every change of gods.

The more the Serpent prayed and pranced, the worse Jipfur felt.

"Get out! I've had enough. Go back and hound the people. That's all you fakirs are good for."

I stalled the fellow at the door to ask him a question. His magic boxes had reminded me of the vocoder and my foolishness in trading it off to a Babylonian junk man. I described the thing from all angles. But the Second Serpent had never seen it.

I ran across Serpent Number Three in a busy market place. I recognized him by his enormous hunch-back; coming closer, I saw the grotesque mask of black-and-white circled eyes that I had remembered from my first glimpse of the trio in the marshes. Those ring-eyes had since become a familiar face to me from public meetings and parades that brought rich and riff-raff together.

Serpent Number Three was engrossed in a cracker-barrel discussion of Babylonia's economic system when I interrupted him. He turned his frozen ring-eyes on me. I wondered whether he was grinning or scowling inside the mask.

He came.

"Very fancy," he commented, as we drove up to the front entrance of the palace. "You know we Serpents always enter through the tunnels under the inner court."

"You're more than a Serpent today," I said. "If you can tell Jipfur what's wrong with him you're more than a doctor."

As he hobbled out of my chariot I was amused at myself for having been so chatty with such a ragged creature—but after all, he was reasonably clean, and that set him apart from the other Serpents.

I WATCHED him ascend the steps past the scowling guards. For a man handicapped not only with a huge misproportioned back but also a peg leg, he carried himself with a remarkable bearing.

Again I mused upon my vagaries of sympathy for a Serpent—indeed, it was admiration. However illogical, I began to wonder whether he might have a brand of magic up his sleeve that would shake Jipfur out of his nervous breakdown.

But by the time I had turned my chariot over to the stable slaves and entered the palace, it was all over for the Third Serpent. He had shot his wad, point-blank, and blasted Jipfur into an unholy rage.

Six guards with gleaming battle axes marched him down to a dungeon and locked him up.

I turned to Kish. "How in the name of Marduk did he earn a jail term?"

"He said that Jipfur's trouble came from trying to carry too big a weight," said Kish. "He said the weight was black guilt."

"That Serpent is nobody's fool," I said. "I wonder what he's up to."

"He's done," said Kish. "The big boss booked him for an early execution—on religious grounds."

I gave up expecting any help from doctors and men of magic, though I went on searching fruitlessly for Serpent Number One. For more reasons than one Jipfur was anxious to see him.

One day I returned to the palace to discover that a famous Egyptian wise man, sojourning with the Babylonian king, had paid a call to Jipfur, made the perfect diagnosis, prescribed the perfect cure.

A fanfare of trumpets called all the officials of the palace into assembly, and Jipfur himself marched before us to announce the great news. The room

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grew tense with silence. Obviously the Egyptian wise man *had* struck upon something vital, for Jipfur was almost his old self again—straight, brittle, arrogant.

"The flames that have tortured me are subsiding," he said. "The gods be praised, I have been visited by one who saw through my troubles. I must break down a barrier which Slaf-Carch built before me."

Kish, sitting beside me at the rear of the room, whispered, "Here it comes!"

"That barrier has been a trap for me. Some men can live in traps, but not Jipfur."

He filled his chest, tossed his head insolently.

"All my life I have won everything I sought, I have wanted for nothing. In order to be myself I must never want for anything. To live, I must remove the barrier. That is what the wise man from Egypt told me. I shall obey him."

Jipfur paused for a brief breathless moment. Then—

"No matter what the voice of Slaf-Carch has said—no matter what his voice may say—tomorrow I shall marry the yellow-haired foreigner girl named Betty."

A loud and boisterous cheer thundered through the room, and dignitaries leaped to their feet to call for drinks and feasts.

I moved involuntarily toward the nearest exit, but Kish caught my arm and whispered, "Wait. Don't hurry away. You'll be seen. Besides, I've already taken care of everything."

CHAPTER VIII

"YOU'RE no chariot driver," Jipfur snarled at me. "It's no wonder you never found the First Serpent."

"Yes, your honor," I said.

"At the rate you're going, you'll never overtake her. She could outrun us on foot."

"Yes, your honor."

"Give me those reins. I'll show you how to drive. I'll wager in your foreign land the people travel no faster than the turtle crawls."

"Very true, your honor," I said.

Jipfur whipped up the horses, our chariot hummed along at a merry gait. He grumbled because Kish wasn't able to attend him on this job. Only a cursed weakling, he growled, would let a few sore spots keep him off duty so long.

For my part, I was quite content to make this wild-goose chase, as long as Kish would keep Betty hidden. That was his clever scheme—and he'd planted the trail so skillfully that the bull moose was sure he would overtake her somewhere beyond Borbel.

"We've got to find her today," Jipfur said for the twentieth time. "The people mustn't know that she's run away. She'd never live it down!"

Actually, Betty hadn't run away. At this moment she was hiding in the tunnels below the palace.

But that hiding place couldn't last long. Slaves were continually at work through these tunnels, carrying water for the fountain reservoirs. There were Serpents Four, Five, and Six—Jipfur's confidential men—who entered at irregular intervals by these subterranean passages. And there was Serpent Num-Three, of the hunch-back and wooden leg, a prisoner in an underground dungeon. He occupied a dangerous vantage point. How much he had seen of our clandestine maneuvers, how much he would tell to the guards was another mountain of worry.

"Take these reins," Jipfur snapped. "I've got things to think about. How can I think when I'm driving?"

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I took the reins and Jipfur ordered me to drive straight into Borbel.

"We'll pick up the First Serpent while we're at it," he said. "He'll help us catch that runaway girl."

"Where will we find him?"

"Right in the center of town. I can spot him in a street crowd as far as I can see."

As it happened, Jipfur made his boast good.

We slowed up approaching a large crowd at the foot of the Borbel ziggurat. The center of attraction was the First Serpent.

He stood on the first level of the ziggurat making a speech. The crowd was so engrossed that no one noticed our approach.

"I've told you I want to confess!" he yelled. "By the gods, I'm going to confess! No matter what happens to me —or to someone else—I'll be glad I've confessed!"

A hard gasp escaped Jipfur's lips.

"The night it happened," the First Serpent continued, as his spellbound audience leaned forward eagerly, "everything was pitch-dark. We approached the garden on foot—two of us —my master and I—"

"Quick!" Jipfur whispered to me. "Swing the chariot around . . . Careful! . . . Now—drive back to Babylon as fast as you can go!"

We slipped out of Borbel without creaking a wheel. Then we flew—and I mean *flew*. And Jipfur never said a word about the people in my foreign country being slow.

All he said was, "Help me into the palace, Hal. I'm sick!". . .

THAT night it was all over Babylon —the biggest news story of the year: A Serpent had confessed before all Borbel. He had described precisely how he and his master—no other than the celebrated young patesi, Jipfur—had murdered Slaf-Carch! And the minute he had finished his speech the civil authorities had seized him, and burned him in a public bonfire!

Now the throngs were gathering outside the palace of Jipfur, clamoring for him to appear and make *his* confession.

Torchlight parades circled round and round. Shouting and rhythmic catcalls rang through the streets.

Every life inside the palace was in danger. If this savage multitude turned to mob violence, Jipfur's friends and foes alike would be trampled under foot or caught in racing flames.

Jipfur's order to his guards to "Disperse those howling idiots!" was no more effective than the barking of a dog. The guards shrugged in dismay. Their huge battle axes turned awkwardly in their hands. Though they had served Jipfur and his aristocratic sister all their lives, this ordeal shook their loyalties to the roots.

Jipfur's sister said she would walk out on the steps and cry her brother's innocence. Never had her queenly dignity failed to impress the masses of common people.

But the proud sister advanced only one step outside the door, when a shower of clods and eggs and stones brought her back, wailing like a spanked child.

The dignitaries put their heads together for one of their briefest conferences on record. They watched furtively as the street crowds gathered material for a bonfire; they talked business fast. In a moment they came up with their version of a bright idea.

They crowded around Jipfur, who was standing back among the pillars of the central hallway between trembling attendants bearing lighted candles.

"We've got it," said one of the dignitaries. "The mob wants violence.

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We'll give them violence. They want another life to pay for Slaf-Carch. We'll give them another life. We'll give them your prisoner—the Third Serpent."

Jipfur nodded and turned to me, his eyes bugging with terror.

"Bring up the Third Serpent." He handed me the key.

I knew what he meant: I should get a squad of guards to bring up the Serpent. But I had ideas of my own.

I PICKED up a lighted candlestick and skipped down the dark stairs. The echoes of the palace turmoil grew fainter. I hurried through the underground passages, came to the hub of several subterranean avenues, one of which led to the row of prison cells.

My candle cast broad stripes of shadows beyond the iron bars. I caught sight of the black and white circles of eyes—the mask of the Third Serpent. In the darkness I could not see his deformed, crippled figure—only his ghastly mask. He clacked across the stone floor on his peg leg to meet me.

I rushed on past his door. But my curious wisp of admiration for this strange creature stopped me. I went back and unlocked his prison bars.

"I'm taking a chance on you," I said. "They want you upstairs. They want to throw you to the howling mob. But I'm turning you free. Watch your step."

"And what happens to you," he asked, "when you fail to deliver me?"

"I'm leaving," I said. "While the mob howls—that's the time for me to get away."

"Alone?" he asked sharply.

Again I had that frantic urge to jerk his mask off—and see his hidden expression.

"Not alone," I said. "I'm taking the yellow-haired girl—and possibly Kish."

"Let me go with you, Hal," he said. "You'll need me before you get to Egypt."

"How'd you know—"

"It's the only safe way to go, if you mean to get out of Jipfur's reach."

"Yes, of course. But as to your coming—"

I hesitated, trying to bring myself to a decision. I thought of Betty—of the stormy night we once spent in a cave beside the Euphrates, not knowing that this ragged, grotesque, circle-eyed creature of magic was there too.

"Very well," I said shortly. "Follow us when we leave. Meanwhile you're on your own."

Two avenues further on I rapped at a musty wooden door.

Betty was there, never more beautiful than by candlelight. Two girls—confidantes from her kitchen staff—were with her. Kish had brought them warning of the impending mob attack a few minutes earlier. From their frightened expressions they must have thought everyone upstairs was being murdered by this time.

I spoke in English.

"Betty, it's time we made a run for it. Egypt. We'll get Kish if we can. And there'll be another—a bodyguard."

Betty shook her head slowly, dazedly.

"We'll go . . ." Her English words came forth like measured notes from low, soft chimes. "But not to Egypt."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you seen Kish?" she asked.

"Not recently—why?"

"He received a message—for you. One of your watchers—on the great ziggurat—"

"*The time machine!*" I gasped.

Betty nodded. "It came this afternoon—and left us *this*."

SHE pressed the octagonal plate of glass in my hand. A paper message was fixed between the transparent layers. It was a note signed by Colonel

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Milholland. It read:

"I am still trying to bring you back from the past. I will rotate through several locations making two stops in each place, twenty-four hours apart. The time machine will come again tomorrow on the exact hour and in the exact spot that it deposits this glass plate today.

Colonel Milholland."

I crept up the stairs muttering to myself about Joshua.

They say that Joshua once managed to make the sun stand still. If I could only have been blessed with that power, *inverted,* maybe you think I wouldn't have sent Old Sol spinning around to tomorrow afternoon!

What a jam I had let myself into by freeing that hunchbacked Serpent. Tomorrow afternoon would never come for me, I thought. If those dignitaries still wanted someone to throw to the hungry mob, they were sure to think of me—after what I had done!

To my surprise I heard no hooting and howling of mobsters as I crossed the central hall. A chill of terror struck me. That silence must mean something dreadful.

Even when you've been thrown in with a brutal, conceited scoundrel like Jipfur, and you've hated his every deed, somehow it gets you, nevertheless, to think that good recent fellow-humans have turned on him and burned him at the stake.

But my tender sentiments were premature. I had under-estimated Jipfur's cleverness. As a patesi he was supposed to stand arm-in-arm with the Babylonian gods, and he probably knew just how far he could depend upon them in a crisis.

Somehow he and the dignitaries had got the torchlight multitude under control during my absence. The idea of throwing them a prisoner to burn had obviously been discarded. Jipfur was out on the steps making a speech.

I crept to the window and listened.

"In the name of Shamash, in the name of Marduk, in the name of Ishtar, I present myself before you. I have declared myself innocent of the dastardly deed with which a certain human Serpent tried to link my good name.

"But let my innocence be declared not by myself, nor by you, nor by any man. Let my innocence be declared by the gods.

"Tomorrow at high noon I shall ascend the steps of the king's palace and stand upon the plaza for all to see me. Then and there, *let the gods strike me dead* if I have ever been guilty of raising a hand to kill or to harm one of my fellow men."

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS nearly noon.

Betty and I hurried toward the great ziggurat.

The wide inclined path up to the first level was like a street, always alive with pedestrains. A few yards up we stopped, gazed down over the edge.

"There's your flat-headed little petrified man," I said.

Betty smiled wistfully. "I suppose we'll never see him again. . . . But I'll believe in that legend—forever!"

"Why don't *you* look many times upon the river?" came a familiar voice.

We turned, and Betty shuddered, catching my arm. It was the Third Serpent, his mask of encircled eyes as impenetrable as ever. I hadn't expected ever to see him again.

"I thought you were going to leave, Hal," he said, shifting his huge back uncomfortably.

"We are," I said, "but not for Egypt. We must hurry on."

"When you come down from the

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tower," he said, "I must thank you for freeing me."

"We won't be coming down," said Betty, smiling mysteriously. We continued our ascent.

The Third Serpent hobbled along following us all that way to the third level and there, as we looked down over the sprawling city, he approached us again.

"Of course you won't leave Babylon," he said, "until you know whether Jipfur is guilty or innocent of a murder."

"We can't wait," I said.

"I myself am very curious to know what the gods will say," said the Serpent. "The lives of several thousand people will be affected one way or another. If the gods should strike him down—"

"Don't worry," I laughed. "With all due respect to the gods, I'm sure Jipfur knows what he's doing."

It was a long steep climb, and we rested again on the fifth level. That left two more to go.

Betty frowned as she looked down on the glazed brick buildings.

"I see the king's palace," she said, "but where is the crowd?"

I didn't know. I had supposed the plaza would be packed with a vast multitude. Was it possible that Jipfur had slid out of his proposition to stand before the gods?

"On top of the ziggurat is the palace to stand before the gods," said the Third Serpent. "That's why so many people have been passing us. Most of the crowd is ahead of us."

"Ahead of us!" I was already dizzy from the four hundred and fifty feet of climbing. This remark gave me a whirling sensation as if I were spiralling down on a roller coaster.

"The king changed the place of the test," said the Third Serpent, adding in the same dry voice. "Why are you suddenly hurrying?"

"You wouldn't understand," I said. "But we've got a certain spot *reserved*. We've got to get there—and—and *clear it!*"

THE Third Serpent was right, the crowd was ahead of us, a good five thousand strong—an ample number to witness Jipfur's challenge to the gods.

The ceremony was already in progress. The five thousand spectators sat close-packed on the brick floor—a vast circle of sky gazers, their eyes intent on the big fluffy clouds that passed—almost low enough to touch.

Jipfur was looking up, too, shouting into the heavens, calling the names of the Babylonian deities, challenging them brazenly.

"Come, Shamash, if you have any accusations against me, strike me with lightning. Come, Ishtar—"

I saw the anxiety flash through Betty's face. She knew it must be only a matter of minutes until our departure.

Very well, in a few minutes we would be ready. The watchman had told us the exact point where the glass message had been deposited. We had only to take a few measurements—

But how could we? This vast throng packed every inch of circumfrence around the tower-top!

"Quick!" Betty whispered. "We've got to disregard them."

I knew she was right. I forced my way through to a specified point at the outer edge, tried to take measured steps across the thicket of spectators.

"Down! Down!" the people hissed. They were intent on the show at the center of the ring. Jipfur was waving his arms, bellowing into the skies.

Betty moaned, "We've got to wait. Maybe they'll leave soon."

"I'm afraid not," I said. "The bull moose means to keep it up till he wears

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them out. Listen to him!"

"Strike me down, if you dare, Oh Marduk! Stab me with fire if I have ever been guilty of an unkind deed!"

He tossed his pudgy head from side to side. The wavy locks beneath his cone-shaped cap fluttered in the breeze. The brass necklace, "Bull Moose," dangled from his throat, swinging with each boastful beckon of his arms.

"In their blindness," Jipfur roared, "my fellowmen have accused me of murdering Slaf-Carch, my beloved uncle. If I did this deed, strike me dead this inst—"

It came! It flashed down out of the sky—a veritable spiral of lightning. Five thousand people caught the quick glimpse—a cylinder of red fire!

Then it was gone.

Betty clutched my hand and I felt the awful throb of disappointment in her grip. Our chance had come and gone—and here we sat, helpless, surrounded by five thousand Babylonians, viewing the sham-religious antics of Jipfur—

What had happened?

Jipfur was lying down, motionless—*but not all of him.* Only the lower half of his body was there. *The top half was gone!*

NO BLOOD ran, no muscles twitched, there was no life in that weird looking mass of trunk, hips, and legs. But the rest of the body—chest, arms, and head—had vanished with the flash of heavenly fire.

"Jipfur! *Jipfur!*"

Scores of voices called the name at once, but the shrill cry of the patesi's haughty sister rang out above the rest. Several persons started toward the grotesque, lifeless object, then drew back in fear and trembling. Hundreds of people began to mumble prayers aloud.

Suddenly, above the welter of excited clamoring, an old familiar voice sounded, loud and clear. *It was the never-to-be-forgotten voice of Slaf-Carch.*

"Today the gods have spoken!"

A chorus of murmurs echoed the words, like a chant. Then there was a tense silence of waiting, broken at last by a throbbing outcry from Jipfur's sister.

"Speak on, Slaf-Charch! We are listening."

Again the voice of Slaf-Carch spoke and as his gentle words came forth, Betty's hand, held tightly in mine, ceased to tremble.

"Today Jipfur has been taken from you," said the voice. "Let his passing bring peace to all who were once my laborers and my slaves. I am still with you in spirit. My helpers may carry on for me if they are willing. Even those of you who have come from a foreign land—and a foreign *time*—may find your ultimate place here. If you believe in me, stay and become my chosen leaders."

BETTY and I were among the last to descend the lofty tower that afternoon. There was so much to talk about, so much to plan. Somehow Slaf-Carch's words made the world look fresh and new for both of us, now that all Betty had feared and dreaded was gone.

"As long as you're here, Hal," she said, looking up at me, starry-eyed, "I don't care whether I ever go back to the twentieth century."

"What?" I said with a wink. "Haven't you any feelings for your poor uncle, the Colonel?"

"The Colonel!" Betty laughed. "We've sent him a bull moose. What more could he ask? . . ."

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ONE day after Betty, Kish and I had gotten the business reorganization of Borbel palace well under way—Jipfur's sister having generously honored us with managerial responsibilities and a share of ownership—I invited the Third Serpent to come in for an interview.

He closed the door behind him, settled his misshapen back within a comfortable chair, and apparently stared at me through his ring-eyed mask.

I said, "I've been looking over the records. You are fairly new to this Serpent clique, I see."

"I joined early last fall, shortly before you and Jipfur met us by the marsh."

"This job of gouging peasants for money apparently didn't agree with you. You were very easy on them, I find."

"You are welcome to fire me," said the Third Serpent dryly, "if my work is unsatisfactory."

"I've fired the others," I replied. "In your case, however, certain other services are not to be overlooked. You are deserving of something over and above a Serpent's salary. Have you ever considered taking a vacation to—say, the twentieth century?"

The Third Serpent gave a gurgling chuckle and settled more comfortably in his chair. "As a matter of fact, I have. I'd like to go back for a facial surgery job sometime—" he supplemented his smooth Babylonian words with a sprinkling of English—"sometime after the Colonel grows a bit steadier at the controls. Naturally, I'd give anything to get out of this mask."

"Is it—quite bad?"

The Third Serpent nodded. "I never allow anyone to see me. Of course I had to learn to talk all over. Does *she* suspect?"

"Not at all," I said. "The voice of Slaf-Carch is the real McCoy with her. You know how she loves that river legend."

"Childlike!" he mused. "That's why she's a good Babylonian." He rose to go.

"That hunched back of yours, Professor," I said, "is it another Babylonian legend?"

He laughed. "It might be some day. I developed it the same week you traded off the vocoder. It's made of leather—detachable, of course—and a splendid place to keep my magic. By the way, your machine's a wonder. It tones down so soft that my fellow Serpents never heard me practicing my Slaf-Carch."

"You were perfect. And to think you've actually made Slaf-Carch live on."

"He deserves to live on." He moved to the door, then turned back. "You won't say anything to my daughter, of course. If she knew, she'd want to see me. For the present it's better that she believe me dead."

"For the present," I nodded. "But I'll insist that the Third Serpent be present at our Babylonian wedding."

« MONSTER BEAVERS »

IN reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES you doubtlessly must sometimes doubt the credence of the strange doings in some of the stories, but don't be too quick to do your doubting because there is plenty of scientific proof on hand to back up the authenticity of these yarns.

Take, for example, *Castoroides,* or giant beavers that lived in North America some odd 1,000,000 years ago. These beavers reached a length of six feet and were the largest rodents ever to live. Imagine a rat the size of a Shetland pony and you get some idea of the size of these weird creatures.

Now you can see that our writers are not just imagining things when they speak of strange oversized animals, gigantic rats, enormous bats, gargantuan gorillas, and the like; they are speaking the truth and are telling you of things as, in many cases, they actually existed, or may some day exist. *Ellery Watson.*

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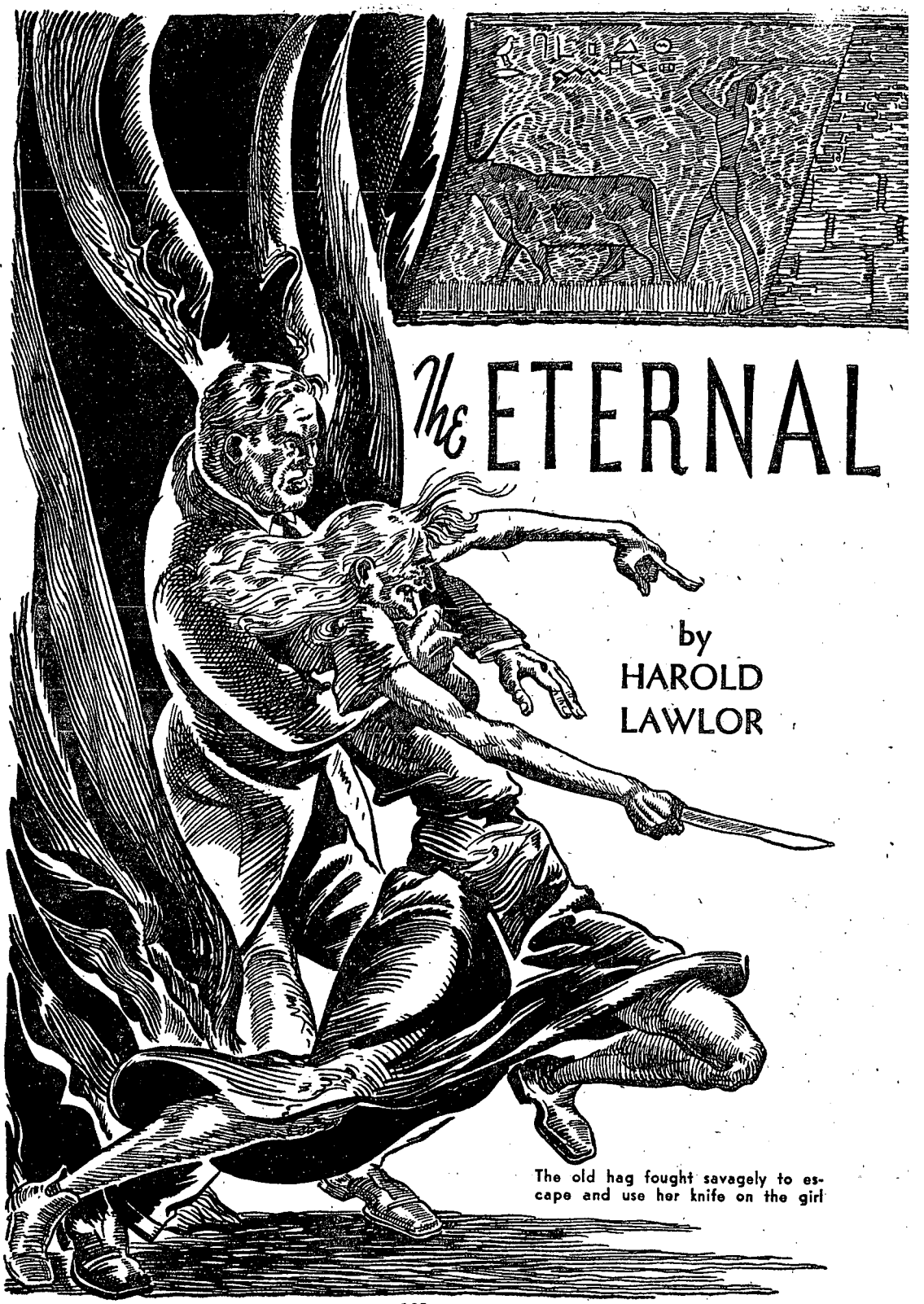

The ETERNAL

by HAROLD LAWLOR

The old hag fought savagely to escape and use her knife on the girl

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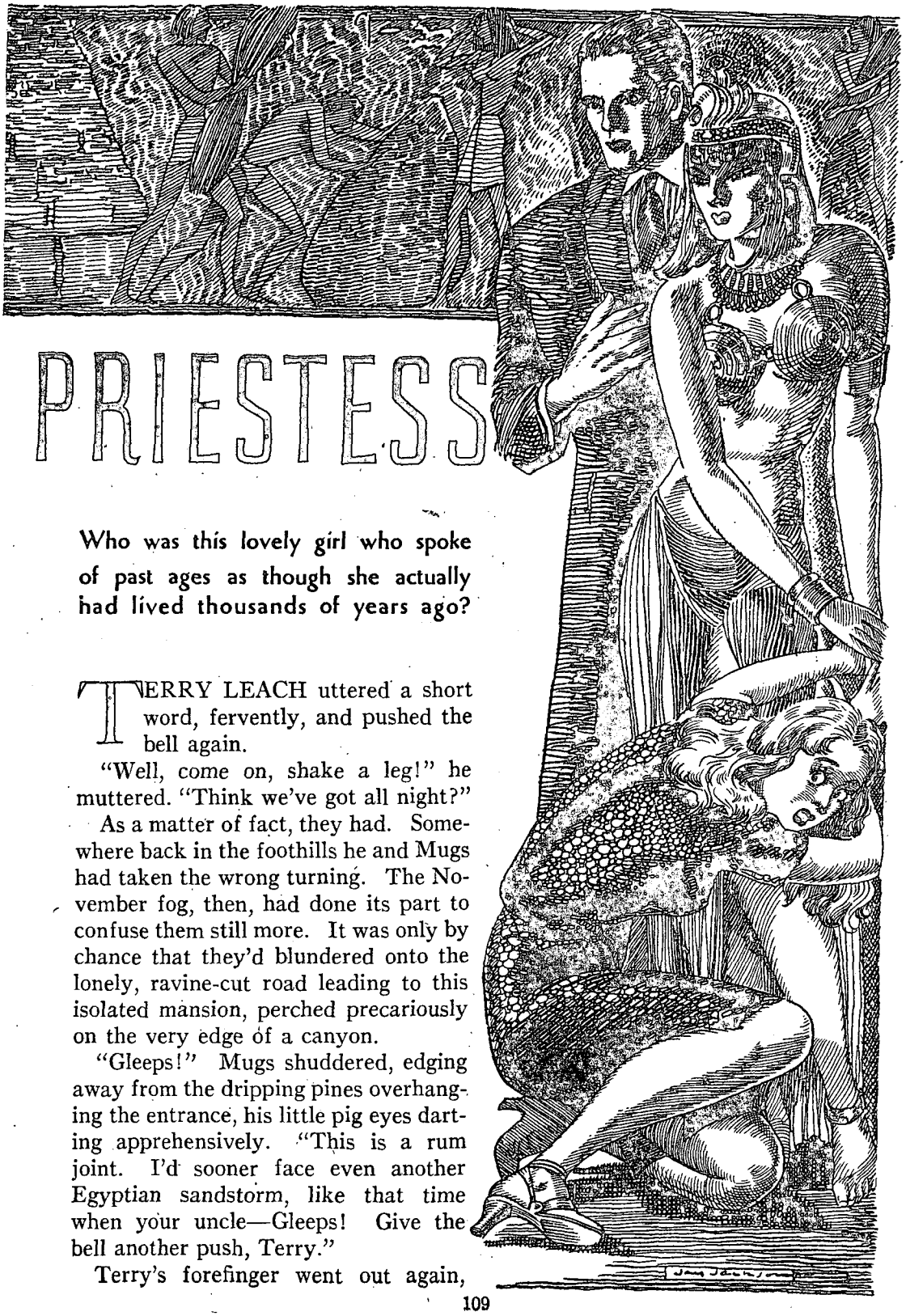

PRIESTESS

Who was this lovely girl who spoke of past ages as though she actually had lived thousands of years ago?

TERRY LEACH uttered a short word, fervently, and pushed the bell again.

"Well, come on, shake a leg!" he muttered. "Think we've got all night?"

As a matter of fact, they had. Somewhere back in the foothills he and Mugs had taken the wrong turning. The November fog, then, had done its part to confuse them still more. It was only by chance that they'd blundered onto the lonely, ravine-cut road leading to this isolated mansion, perched precariously on the very edge of a canyon.

"Gleeps!" Mugs shuddered, edging away from the dripping pines overhanging the entrance, his little pig eyes darting apprehensively. "This is a rum joint. I'd sooner face even another Egyptian sandstorm, like that time when your uncle—Gleeps! Give the bell another push, Terry."

Terry's forefinger went out again,

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savagely, just as the heavy oaken door swung inward.

The woman standing in the musty hall, holding the seven-branched candlestick aloft, was old. Old. Yellow scalp showed through her thin white hair, her eyes seemed filmed by cataracts, the black stuff of her gown was coated with gray.

Before Terry could speak, the woman raised her free hand to her sunken lips, then gestured outward insistently.

"Away!" she croaked. *"Away!"*

She fell back a few steps, trembling until the candles guttered, but her filmed eyes never left Terry's. *"Away!"*

Terry's ear was assaulted by Mugs' violent hiss. "The dame is nuts!"

Terry ignored him. "Look," he said to the hag, following her in, "we're not going to hurt you. We've lost our way and—"

There was an interruption. A blonde girl not more than nineteen, heavy with child, parted dusty velvet portieres at the back of the hall, the wooden rings from which they were hung rattling noisily, attracting the old woman's attention.

She turned and glared so balefully at the newcomer that the blonde drew in her breath shudderingly, and her red-rimmed eyes opened wide, wild with fear.

Terry's stomach muscles tightened. He thought the hag was going to throw the candelabrum at the shrinking girl. But wordlessly the old crone raised her yellow claw and pointed back in the direction whence the girl had come.

The blonde's head drooped. One instant her awkward body was outlined against the dingy velvet, then she was gone. If it weren't for the somehow sinister swaying of the velvet folds, Terry would have thought he'd dreamed it all.

The old woman, mumbling, let her hand fall to her side. Terry felt his muscles relax. Air was in his lungs again, but the palms of his hands were strangely clammy.

"Goodbye now," Mugs was muttering. "Let's get out of here." He kept looking back over his heavy shoulder. "This dump gives me the collywobbles."

Terry's lean cheeks rounded in a smile. The beefy brute was actually scared, for once in his life!

Mugs saw the smile and straightened defensively. "Not that I'm scared, or anything—" He gestured nonchalantly to show how cool he was, and knocked a figurine from the carved oak chest at his side. Automatically he stooped to retrieve it, then stiffened. "Look, Terry, ain't this—"

It was a small chalcedony statue of Bubastis, the sacred cat of Egypt, though what in the world it was doing here, Terry couldn't even guess. But he recognized that it was undeniably genuine. He'd made one archaeological expedition with his Uncle Ned, the well-known Egyptologist, shortly before the war broke out.

AT A low growl from the hag's withered lips, he hastily replaced the figurine on the chest.

"Hey look!" Mugs was staring up the red-carpeted stairway that hugged the left-hand wall, his eyes threatened to pop from their sockets. Terry followed the direction of his gaze, then stiffened.

A woman was standing on the landing, halfway up. But what a woman! When she saw she'd been observed, she commenced to descend, slowly, her feet in golden sandals making no sound. The peacock-green draperies of her skirt were slit from ankle to jeweled girdle, revealing flashes of creamy calf and flawless thigh as she moved.

Somewhere back of Terry, Mugs was

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moaning: "Gleeps!"

As she came into the circle of light cast by the candles, Terry saw that her torso was bare, golden plates hiding her breasts. And that her eyes were hidden by a veil that hung from an Egyptian headdress.

For a moment Terry's jaw hung slackly. Then he threw back his head and laughed. It was too much, this costume coming on top of everything else.

"Ah, there, Cleo!" he grinned. "And how'd you leave Mark Anthony?"

The only answering laughter was Mugs'. uncertain bray, that faded quickly into a bleat as the veiled eyes swept over him hostilely. Even Terry felt some emanation from those hidden eyes that sent an icy draught up his long spine.

Ignoring him, she addressed the old woman. "What is it, Ola?" The words were blurred by an indefinable accent.

The hag cowered back and again made that outward gesture, *Away!*

The girl in the Egyptian costume shrugged, faced the men. "My housekeeper, Mrs. Gronk, is—" She broke off significantly. "You seek shelter from the coming storm, yes? Mrs. Gronk, show the fat one to a room." She turned to Terry, regarded him speculatively. "But you follow me, please."

"Hey!" Mugs said plaintively. "Whaddya mean—*fat one?*"

She didn't answer, but moved lithely to still another portiered doorway and disappeared. Terry followed, calling over his shoulder: "Bring in the bags from the car, Mugs. You can show the lady your muscles later."

Mug's baffled snarl followed him through the draperies.

TERRY found himself in a long drawing room, its ends lost in shadows. The girl was standing in the middle of a cleared space. Furniture of every period crowded the room, and many-branched candelabra in floor stands guarded the keyboard of a massive ebony grand piano, sprawling its great length across a curtained alcove.

The wind was rising. Terry could hear it *woo-hoo* about the eaves. He eyed the girl, waited expectantly.

But she just stood there in the exact center of the turkey-red carpet, her hands clasped before her. She, too, seemed to be waiting. Her expression was unfathomable.

Finally he said uncomfortably, "I'm Terry Leach. And you—?"

The little nose beneath the veil was straight, exquisite; the jawline hinted of great beauty; the unsmiling lips were soft and warm and blood-red; the black hair curled inward at the ends and brushed the girl's bare shoulders.

"They call me—T'Risha."

"T'Risha? It's an unusual name."

The red lips held a hint of mockery. "I'm—an unusual person."

"Who are you? Why do you live here in this isolated place?"

"I leased it because it's remote. I have had enough of Europe, of witnessing the evil antics of my fellow-men."

Terry frowned. "Speaking of evil antics, your housekeeper isn't very prepossesing."

T'Risha shrugged. "I keep Ola because she doesn't talk. And even if she did, people would think it the ravings of a lunatic."

Terry wanted to ask what Ola Gronk could tell, but T'Risha then smiled faintly, and seated herself at the piano. It was done leisurely as if she were playing for time, playing with him before—what? He didn't know. But at the first notes she struck from the yellowed keyboard, he forgot his suspicions, sank into a chair and listened in

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amazement.

It was music the like of which he'd never heard. It had nothing to do with modern rhythm or melody; it was weird, eerie, yet holding a strange note of exaltation. And it was accompanied by the disturbing obbligato of the rising storm and the subdued creakings of the ancient house.

Terry, annoyed, felt himself fighting the spell it seemed to cast.

"What was that?" he asked when she had finished.

T'Risha regarded her hands, still lying on the keys. A scarab shone dully on the index finger.

"That was the coronation music for Nefertiti. I was her attendant."

Terry felt more comfortable—and a little disappointed. The girl had effectively broken this strange enchantment. She was merely being ridiculous. For Nefertiti, he remembered, lived about 1370 B. C. Nevertheless, he didn't blink an eye.

"That's nice," he offered casually. "Let's see — that makes you about thirty-three hundred years old."

"Yes," she said quite simply. And didn't smile.

TERRY'S handsome mouth tilted. "You're certainly well-preserved!" He eyed her lissome figure meaningly.

T'Risha stood up. "You misunderstand. It's not my body, but my *mind* that's old. It has been transferred from body to body for generations."

"Just for the hell of it?"

"As a punishment—because once I aspired to Nefertiti's lover, thirty-three centuries ago." She seemed to forget Terry, then, raised her arms despairingly. "Ah, Nefertiti, how cunning you were! How well you guessed the horror of such a penalty! My body ever young—my mind and my memory weighted, sickened with the evil of the world—appalled by the things I've witnessed!"

Terry was staring. "You couldn't be nuts by any chance?"

"Nuts?"

"You know—insane."

"Oh!" As he watched, the wild passion of her outburst faded. Apparently she only now became aware, for the first time, of his irony. Curiously, she wasn't angry. "You scoff? You think my words merely the maunderings of a diseased mind? But of course! How could your poor modern mind encompass these things?"

Her contemptuous pity put him on the defensive, even as he realized the absurdity of it.

" 'Poor modern mind,' boloney!" he said inelegantly. "Look what the modern mind has accomplished in science alone—"

"Pouf!" She appeared genuinely amused. "Modern science! Those poor, weak, misguided efforts! Why, I could show you things that modern science has never dreamed of—" She broke off, commanded sharply: *"Kiss me!"*

Surprised by the sharp order, he took one step forward, then froze where he was, instantly wary. Some trick, his mind warned.

A strange thing happened to Terry Leach then. Every atom of his strong will commanded his body to remain where it was. But slowly, *irresistibly,* his legs began to carry him toward T'Risha!

The red mouth drew him like some lovely, evil flower. Haltingly he moved, fighting this magnetic influence every step of the way, his brow wet with the effort he was making to resist. Haltingly, his head bent and his mouth closed down over hers and clung, the contact blurring everything with a crimson haze.

T'Risha had not moved a finger.

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She drew her mouth from his. "Why did not your modern knowledge help you?" she asked mockingly. "See how powerless you were against thirty three centuries of older knowledge?"

TERRY shook his head to clear it, fought back a mad desire to kiss those crimson lips again.

"Hypnotism!" he said scornfully. But his voice shook.

She shook her head.

His hands slid down her upper arms and held them just above the elbows. And suddenly he knew that he must see her eyes.

He must.

Before she could suspect his intention, he raised his hand and tore away the veil. And instantly wished that he had not.

She hid her eyes quickly beneath her heavy lashes, but not before he saw that they were long and oval, and of a brilliant emerald green.

And they were weary as the world, and as old and evil.

Terry shuddered and recoiled, despite himself. Silence fell while those unusual eyes regarded him—flatly, unblinkingly, like the eyes of a cat; a silence broken only by the howl of the wind, a crackling from the hearth.

Then the silence was cut by a scream that rose and fell, ululated wildly, was cut off at its height.

The blonde girl came running in and threw herself at T'Risha's feet. In the extremity of her terror, the girl couldn't speak. She could only gesture blindly toward the doorway.

The curtains billowed and gyrated madly, parted with a clash of rings as Mugs came in, pushing the struggling housekeeper before him.

"This dame is nuts!" he panted to Terry. "She was gonna carve the little blonde."

The housekeeper's face was distorted evilly; the silver blade of a wicked looking knife she held threw back highlights from the guttering candles.

"Drop that!" T'Risha's command rang out, and the knife slipped to the carpet. "Go to your room!"

Mrs. Gronk gestured menacingly at the girl cowering at T'Risha's feet.

T'Risha's eyes narrowed angrily. "Ola!"

Mrs. Gronk wavered, pulled away from Mugs, muttering. The brown draperies swung to behind her.

"You go to your room, too, Ethel." T'Rihsa raised the shrinking girl to her feet.

"I want to leave!" Ethel wailed. "Why do you keep me here? I wanted to leave—right after Jim died. Why do you keep me here?"

The girl was dangerously near hysteria, Terry saw, but T'Risha remained cold, impassive.

"It is important that you stay. That is enough. To your room, please."

WHILE Ethel was making her forlorn exit, Mugs wavered, deep in what passed for thought. Terry could almost hear the rusty machinery of his mind squeaking. Then after a hasty glance at T'Risha, Mugs ambled after the blonde girl.

Terry asked, "Who was that girl?"

"The widow of my houseman. He died five months ago."

"And Mrs. Gronk's attack, just now —?"

T'Risha frowned. "She has nourished some absurd hatred for the girl, but it means nothing. Ola's half-mad. But the girl must stay. My mind is to be transferred to her child, before dawn."

"And how's that little trick to be accomplished?"

She betrayed annoyance at his sar-

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casm. He saw a small crescent-shaped scar on her forehead glow angrily red for a moment, then fade. But the outburst he half-expected didn't come. Instead she glided silently to the hall, was back in a minute bearing the chalcedony statuette of Bubastis. While he watched, she unscrewed its head, so cunningly fitted that the joint couldn't be detected at first glance.

From the body of the sacred cat, she drew forth a flask of alabaster—of such fragility that the dark shadow of the liquid it contained could be plainly seen.

"This is the Golden Philtre of Nefertiti." T'Risha's face was a mask impervious to Terry's disbelief. She might have been delivering a lecture. "Just before Ethel is delivered of her child, she shall drink of this. The mind-transference is automatically effected."

"And what do you do with your present—uh—chassis?"

T'Risha replaced the flask. "You shall find me dead—but my mind shall live on in the body of Ethel's baby. You will know it by this crescent mark on the child's forehead." She touched the scar.

Terry hooked one leg over a table, and settled himself. This was going to be good! "Now, look," he argued solemnly. "Just suppose I did swallow this wild yarn of yours. It's still pointless. The body you have is perfectly good." He grinned disarmingly. "In fact, plenty of women would give their eyeteeth for it! So why should you just toss it aside like an old shoe? Why start in all over again as a baby?"

T'Risha shook her head sadly. "Listen, have you never stood idly by, fuming, while someone fumbled a job that you could do much better yourself?"

"Well—yes." He was puzzled.

"Exactly. Which is the very essence of Nefertiti's revenge. I, with a brain knowing all things, must periodically become a baby, must submit helplessly to the maddening ministrations of stupid, well-meaning adults. Can you imagine a more exquisite torture?" T'Risha paused to let that sink in, then went on: "Cunningly, she decreed that I should inhabit no one body for more than thirty years. More—I cannot end my torment. That lies beyond my power. For me, there can be no dissolution until the world's end, unless—"

"Yes?"

The green eyes glowed somberly. "Nefertiti vowed that if I could find one person who believed my story—only *one*—then I might truly die, might find peace at last. That is why I have told you this—hoping that you might believe, that I might be free."

Terry waved a magnanimous hand. "Oh, well, if it means that much to you, I believe you. I can believe anything. I'm funny like that."

T'RISHA'S body sagged wearily. "It is not enough that you jocosely profess belief. You must believe—with every cell of your mind, every drop of your blood."

"Sorry." Terry tried to keep his voice properly regretful. "Fun is fun, but that's a pretty large order."

T'Risha nodded as if she'd expected no other answer. She straightened, her face once more composed. "I have one more thing to show you. Perhaps if you see something that your modern science cannot equal— But first, go to your room and see if the fat one is asleep. If not, tell him to stay there. He must not follow. When this is done, rejoin me here."

Terry found Mugs sitting on the side of the bed, one shoe in his hand, staring off into space. He looked as if

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he'd been sitting that way for hours.

Terry extended a hand, palm outward. "Hail, fat one!"

"All-l-l ri-i-ight, wise guy!" Mugs scowled over his beefy shoulder.

Terry grinned. "Keep a candle burning in the window for me, will you? I'm going gadding with Salome. You should hear the yarn she's just been telling me. Boy, with an imagination like hers, she should be writing for the radio. But I'm going to string along until I find out what's behind all this."

"That dame is nuts," Mugs said despondently. He brightened. "But the little blonde, now, Ethel— Say, the first time I seen her something got me —*here*." He thumped his barrel chest resoundingly.

"What got you there?"

"Love, pal, love." Mugs cast down his eyes, smirked, looked very like a coy elephant.

Terry groaned. "Now I *know* there's something wrong with this house!"

He went through the doorway two steps ahead of the shoe Mugs hurled at him.

T'RISHA, wrapped in a sable cloak, waited for him in the drawing room. She directed him to bring the lighted candelabrum, and he followed at her heels through a maze of passages at the rear of the house. Her lovely swaying shoulders preceded him down a flight of steps leading to the basement, down still another flight to a sub-basement.

At the entrance to a long tunnel-like corridor, seemingly carved out of solid rock, she stopped, made as if to turn back. But presently she went on.

The rock walls of the corridor dripped beads of moisture that fell and glittered like diamonds in T'Risha's hair. At the tunnel's far end, they entered a square-cut room. T'Risha lighted tall candles there, and with the aid of a candelabrum which he held aloft, Terry saw a black velvet catafalque in the center of the room, bearing a sheeted figure.

Something about that still figure— the gloomy atmosphere of the room, chill, damp—sent a thrill racing down Terry's spine. He waited.

T'Risha removed the sheet reverently, disclosed the long slim body of a youth, clad only in a narrow loincloth of some elaborately embroidered stuff. A moment she stood there, then threw herself across the young man's breast.

"Makelon!" Her cry held all the sorrow of the ages. "Makelon!"

Terry stirred uncomfortably, his movement sending grotesque shadows staggering across the rock wall.

For long moments T'Risha lay there, sobbing quietly. But when she straightened, her eyes were hard and bright and dry. She gestured, the rings on her fingers sending out points of light. "What modern miracle of embalming can equal this?"

It seemed unbelievable that she had just been weeping. With her despairing cries still echoing in his ears, Terry, shaken, tried to speak deprecatingly. "There's Caruso's body—in Italy—"

"Ah, yes." Wearily. "I have heard. But cold, stark, imprisoned in a hermetically sealed casket lest the air—" She broke off, drew Terry nearer, guided his free hand. "Touch!" she commanded.

He felt his fingers curling, but he let her place them on the young man's arm, felt the smooth muscles of Makelon's biceps give slightly under the pressure of his fingers.

He snatched his hand back, hurriedly. Then, unable to help himself, holding his breath, his hand went out again and rested wonderingly on Make-

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lon's chest. It was soft and warm under his touch. And he saw, amazed, that what he'd thought were cosmetics on the young man's face, was really the warm color of blood, like a blush, under the olive skin.

Slowly, Terry turned to stare into T'Risha's face. "Why he's alive! He's warm! He isn't dead at all!"

The emerald eyes bored into his. "He is dead. He has been dead for thirty-three centuries."

While Terry watched, fascinated, feeling the world revolve around him dizzily, T'Risha replaced the sheet, her slim hands lingering lovingly over their task. Slowly she blew out the candles at either side of that incredible bier.

"Come," she said to Terry, when she had finished.

They retraced their steps in silence.

BACK in the dark entrance hall, T'Risha leaned wearily against the newel post.

"Well?" Her dark eyebrows were slim crescent moons of inquiry above tragic eyes.

Terry was unsmiling at last. All during the silent journey back, he'd recognized, and resented, the fact that his skepticism was sadly shaken by that scene in the crypt. But now that they were back here among relatively accustomed surroundings, he felt all his old disbelief returning. He found he could even think of two reasonable explanations for what he had seen in that cavern room beneath the house. Hypnosis, of the sort associated with the Indian conjuror's rope trick, or—a modern body in a state of catalepsy, induced he knew not how.

But there was one other thing—

"What I don't understand," he said slowly, "is the reason for all this. Now don't give me that mind-transference bunk again. What do you expect to get out of this? What game are you playing?"

"So you still refuse to believe?" she asked, and he saw the last faint ray of hope fade from those lustrous eyes. Her voice held only sadness. "How arrogant you moderns are with your paltry knowledge. How quick to flaunt your skepticism."

She reached up and took a candle from the candelabrum he still held.

"It is always the same," she said drearily. "Always. Somehow, when I saw you tonight, I hoped— But, no matter. I can do no more." Her hand touched his cheek in a light caress of forgiveness. "Good night, Terry Leach, and—goodbye."

She commenced to ascend the stairs, the candle she held making a little pool of light in the gloom.

Some fear born of her last words made Terry call out, "T'Risha, wait!"

"Yes?" She paused but didn't turn.

"I—"

It was on the tip of his tongue to say he believed her, but—oh, hell! Terry Leach swallowing a fantastic yarn like this! He'd wait. In the morning there'd be some perfectly plausible explanation for T'Risha's strange actions. He'd probably learn her name was something prosaic, like Mary Smith, and that she'd been dropped on her head as a baby.

She was still waiting, halfway up the stairs.

"Oh—nothing," Terry finished lamely.

T'Risha resumed her ascent, and Terry watched the graceful swaying of her hips until the golden circle of light from her candle vanished into the recesses of the upper hall. Then, somewhere, a door closed softly.

ITS finality made Terry shiver. He stood there at the foot of the steps

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indecisively, savoring the almost tangible aura of glamor she'd left behind her. About him, the old house shook and moaned, frenzied by the high gusts of the storm that had broken at last. Through the uncurtained windows he could see the fogs, dispelled now by the wind, drifting in gray tatters like shreds of veiling.

Arrogance . . . skepticism, she had said. And why not? Was he a child to believe everything he was told? And yet—if only she hadn't been so damned convincing! If only he could rid himself of this suspicion that he was making a tragic mistake in not believing her.

An idea took possession of him, brought a thoughtful look to his eyes. Going to the chest, he removed the alabaster phial from the body of Bubastis, put it in his pocket, rescrewed the head, and left the sacred cat where he'd found it.

He gained his room to find Mugs asleep, his strangled snores threatening to blast the damask canopy from the top of the bed.

For a moment Terry toyed with the thought of waking him, telling him the story. But he decided against it. Mugs, if he didn't accuse Terry of insanity, would want to leave this madhouse right away. And Terry knew he wouldn't be able to leave himself until this thing was cleared up one way or the other.

He slipped the flask beneath his pillow, divested himself of his clothes, slid between the cold sheets. He could feel the bulge of the alabaster bottle beneath his head.

Dead before morning, she had said. But he had the Golden Philtre. If she tried to trick him—

He tossed and turned, shadowed by a nameless dread, filled with an unshakable sense of depression. Until finally he threw back the covers and got up.

"Damned if she hasn't convinced me!" he muttered softly, jerking into a robe.

Not that he was going to tell her so, now. But there was something he could do, without her knowledge. And if he was just being a gullible sucker, as he half-suspected—well, at least T'Risha wouldn't be able to laugh at him in the morning.

Removing the flask from beneath his pillow, Terry went out into the darkened hall quietly, where only a dim light burned. He didn't know which was Ethel's room, but—

He stopped, then went forward slowly.

OLA GRONK was crouching before a door down the hall.

"What are you doing here?" Terry whispered.

The old housekeeper lifted a face puckered with woe, held a finger to her lips.

"Sh-h-h! I'm guarding the blonde one, waiting for her to call."

Terry scratched his head. Last night the housekeeper seemed bent on killing Ethel. Such dog-like devotion, now, didn't ring true.

But Mrs. Gronk whimpered, "T'Risha bade me stay here. T'Risha threatened me—" She broke off, began to rock back and forth in misery.

Terry entered Ethel's room without knocking, to find her awake, sitting up in bed. She smiled shyly when she saw him.

He took an empty glass from the bedside table, poured the philtre into it.

"I've brought you some medicine, Ethel. Drink!"

Trustingly she downed the potion, handed him the drained glass. Fear gripped him then. What if the stuff was poison? But Ethel lay back against her pillows tranquilly, closed

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her eyes.

Terry sighed in relief, left the room. Mrs. Gronk was still squatting there, but she didn't lift her head.

He paused at the door of his room, then continued on to the staircase. Going to the lower hall, he replaced the phial in the body of Bubastis.

Returning to his room, he slept.

HE WOKE, in the dismal half-light of a gray dawn, to the rushing sound of water teeming down the mountainside, swirling past on either side. Boulders dislodged by the flood struck the house at intervals, shook its foundations. The ancient eyrie moaned its protests, shivered and shook under the pounding assault.

Terry struggled to wakefulness slowly. His sleep had been tortured by hideous dreams . . . macabre figures dancing . . . brilliant emerald eyes taunting. The spectral shapes of unfamiliar furniture puzzled him. It was a minute before he remembered where he was.

He leaned over Mugs, shook him, slapped him. Mugs struggled back to consciousness.

"Huh?" Mugs blinked stupidly. "Morning?" He sat up.

The door from the hall swung open, propelled by the hand of Ola Gronk. She stood there staring, unseeing—the lank wisps of gray hair wild about her leathery face.

"Death," she whispered. *"Death!"* Her talon-like hand waved toward a door across the hall.

"The dame—" Mugs began, almost whimperingly. He couldn't finish the sentence.

Terry swore softly, jerked on his robe. He ran past Mrs. Gronk, threw open the door across the hall. What he saw there brought him up sharply, then drew him with lagging steps.

T'Risha, clad in a long white robe, was lying on the bed, her arms at her sides, her strange eyes closed. Terry bent an ear to her breast, fumbled for her pulse. Nothing.

He whipped to the dressing table for a small mirror, held it before the carmine lips. No blur of breath marred its shining surface. The mirror slipped from his hand.

He stared down at the crescent scar on her immobile brow. Dimly he was aware of the house shuddering around him, pounded by the relentless rains.

"Death!"

Mrs. Gronk, with Mugs at her heels, had followed him in. The hag cackled hysterically, her eerie laughter echoing in the silent room. Her faded eyes grew cunning.

"I know," she whispered. "The blonde one has killed her."

She turned and tottered with surprising speed from the room. Mugs bellowed and followed, Terry at his heels. They caught up with her in the next room, just as she reached the bed there and her claws went out with strangling motions. They dragged her back, thrust her from the room, locked the door.

Ethel, in alarm, had pushed herself up on one elbow. But now she sank back. She smiled tiredly and beckoned, lifting a corner of the blanket at her side. Mugs had eyes only for her, but Terry found himself staring down into the face of a new-born baby.

"T'RISHA," Ethel whispered. "I've called her that because the other T'Risha was kind."

Terry, breath held, bent forward for a closer scrutiny. On the tiny forehead was a crescent-shaped scar! It seemed to mock him.

"We'll get you out of her," Mugs was assuring Ethel. "We—I'll take care

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of you." The light from Ethel's eyes evidently overwhelmed him. He waved a hammy hand. "Glad to do it. It'll be nothing. I mean—aw, nuts!" He gave up bashfully, but his little eyes were glowing.

Terry straightened, his thoughts racing. The sound of the flood waters, a loud murmur before, came to his ears now as an angry roar.

His eyes went to the baby again. And then he was rigid, frozen. For slowly, as he watched, *the crescent scar on the infant's brow faded and disappeared!*

In that very instant there was a sharp, rending noise, and Terry felt himself pitched violently against the wall. Furniture rolled crazily on its casters, brought up against opposite walls with a crash. There was the shrill scream of joists tearing apart from each other.

Terry dragged himself up from where he'd been hurled, temporarily blinded by blood from a deep gash over his right eye.

Mugs was shouting hoarsely, "Terry! The foundations are going! A landslide!"

Plaster fell in patches from the ceiling, sending up little puffs of white dust.

Terry leaped into action. "Take Ethel, quick! But gently." No need to add that last. He picked up the wailing baby himself as Mugs lifted Ethel from the bed, carried her easily.

THE two men with their burdens ran across the sloping floor.

"Mrs. Gronk!" Terry shouted, above the brittle sound of shattering glass, the wrenching racket of tearing wood. There was no answer. The housekeeper was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps she'd gone. If not, it was too late—

They ran down the stairway, bouncing like a springboard now under their feet, its supports almost gone. Through the hall they raced and across the sodden ground until there were fifty yards between them and the house. They were not a minute too soon.

As they stopped and looked back aghast, the house seemed to leap upward. With a deafening racket, it dissolved before their very eyes and disappeared into the canyon.

Echoes of its crashing progress reverberated from the canyon walls for long minutes after the house had actually disappeared. Then finally there was silence, with only the gray sky brooding low to cover its remains.

Mugs broke the silence first. "Gleeps!" he whispered. It had the quality of a prayer.

Ethel buried her face against his shoulder. Terry felt his legs trembling weakly, even though the danger was past. The shrill wailing cry of the baby made itself heard. Terry held her close, and looked with stricken eyes at where the ancient house had stood.

Whatever its secrets, it held them now inviolably, together with Makelon's body, and T'Risha. . . .

A stab of anguish shot through Terry. Regret and remorse pervaded his being, were an oppressive weight in his chest.

He felt very small and unimportant and alone. And pitifully ignorant. What price modern knowledge now? Could it explain T'Risha? Could it tell him what he wanted to know? Wasn't it possible the ancients knew many things beyond our ken? That in thirty-three centuries much has been lost?

His heart ached for the T'Risha he'd lost, but—he had *this* T'Risha!

The baby squirmed in his arms. He looked down. Yes, the scar was gone. Had he succeeded in releasing her from Nefertiti's vengeance? He didn't know. But he'd guard this baby, watch over her, and some day—

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He lifted his glass to toast his double who sat in the chair

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DOUBLE IN DEATH

by GERALD VANCE

THE resident head of the New York State Insane asylum glanced from the release papers on his desk to the tall, middle-aged, intelligent looking man standing before him.

"Yours has been a most interesting case, Colegrave," he said thoughtfully. "Six months ago I would have staked my professional reputation on the fact that you were an incurable inmate. Now," the gray-haired alienist shrugged his shoulders good-naturedly, "I find myself in the position of signing your release papers and offering you my congratulations on your extremely remarkable recovery."

The tall, distinguished man facing the alienist bowed slightly, and smiled.

"Thank you doctor," he said quietly. "You've done a great deal for me I know. Now that I am ready again to take my place in a normal world I find myself somewhat apprehensive. Are you quite sure that I am completely cured?"

The alienist stood up, chuckling.

"The fact that you can ask a question like that is the best indication that you *are* cured. I can say now, Colegrave, that when you first came into this sanitarium, you were the most advanced schizophrenic* I have ever observed. Your cleavage in personality and ego was almost absolute. Mentally, you were two persons. Each segment of your psyche was complete and whole as far as will, memory and temperament were concerned. As a rule when a person is a victim of schizophrenia the eventual result is terrible insanity. The two natures, the two persons you

Colegrave was that phenomenon known as a dual personality—two egos in one body. Then he found a way to separate them!

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might almost say, are constantly warring for supremacy, and the outcome of such mental civil war is usually mental anarchy. By some miracle you escaped that fate."

"I find it hard to believe," Colegrave murmured. "I can remember what it was like when I was possessed of two distinct personalities. I can remember the terrible struggles that I underwent when my dual nature was fighting itself. Until three months ago my life was a living hell. Then, as you know, after my sickness, everything was different. I was a well man again and, somehow, my mental sickness was cured too."

The alienist shook his head, and a puzzled line appeared over his eyes.

"It was very peculiar," he reflected. "That sickness, with its horrible head pains of which you complained, apparently did what the best psychologists in the nation found it impossible to do. It destroyed the second party of your dual nature, leaving you free to enjoy a normal life again. Well, such is science. Infallible to a certain point, and then it goes just as crazy as the best of us do sometimes."

Colegrave shook hands with the doctor then and walked to the door.

"Thanks again for everything," he said.

"Don't mention it," the alienist laughed. "You did all the work yourself."

THEN Colegrave stepped through the door and walked rapidly down the gravel path that led away from the sanitarium. When he reached the iron gate, the doorman opened for him and he passed through onto a dusty, little-used road. This he followed for a mile or so, perspiring freely under the warm rays of the sun as he strode along.

At length he reached the main highway that led to the metropolitan section of New York. A car was waiting there for him and he got in.

The car moved away and Colegrave settled back against the cushions with a sigh of relief. The colored chauffeur was separated from the rear seat by a glass partition which was rolled up into place. Colegrave, however, was not alone. There was another man in the back of the car, a small, cunning looking man, who glanced sidewise at Colegrave and grinned wickedly as the car gathered speed.

"We did it, didn't we?" he smirked. "No one has the faintest suspicion as to what happened to you. Or maybe I should say, what happened to me."

Colegrave smiled, a thin, thoughtful smile.

"Since we are really one person, it is perfectly correct to speak of us in the singular. When I entered their crude sanitarium I was two persons mentally. Now I am two persons physically. Each of my dual natures has a physical manifestation, controlled by one intellect."

The little man scratched his head.

"If we're the same person," he said, frowning, "Why is it I can't understand this situation, while you can."

"Simple enough," Colegrave said quietly. "Make an effort now to absorb what I am going to tell you. It may be important sometime. Ever since I was old enough to reason I realized that I possessed two distinct natures, that I was a schizophrenic. One-half of my nature was respectable on the surface, but quite coldly ambitious at the same time. This half of my nature compelled me to seek success by conventional means, which is the logical way for a man of ambition to advance in the

* Schizophrenia—A mental disease resulting from a split personality. The victim has two natures, generally diametrically opposed to each other.—Ed.

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world.

"My other nature was much more honest and direct than this respectable side of mine. It prompted me to gain wealth and recognition by *any* means that came to hand. This second side of mine would stop at nothing to achieve its ends. It demanded that I kill, that I steal, that I lie, that I do *anything* which would gain wealth and power for me.

"As a result, for the most of my life I have been engaged in a constant inner struggle. My respectable self would not object to ill-gotten gains or murder, but it did object to the possibility of exposure. My second half cared nothing for the hypercritical approval of the world. It was willing to take any and all consequences."

COLEGRAVE paused and glanced at the small, ruthlessly cunning man who was listening avidly to every word.

"It finally became obvious," he went on, "that something had to be done. When I entered the state sanitarium it was not by accident. I planned that deliberately and carefully. I realized that the only way I could achieve what I wanted from this world, would be to make the cleavage in my nature a physical one, so that my two natures could operate independently for the greater good of the single unit. This I accomplished at the sanitarium. It was simply a question of will power. The stupid doctors imagined my headaches were organic in nature, but they were actually the result of intense, feverish concentration over a period of three months."

"How could you create a physical manifestation of your secondary nature by will power alone?"

"It was not easy," Colegrave replied. "Since I am Colegrave, the respected citizen, with the advantages of an excellent education, I am able to understand the process. You are my secondary nature, primitive, ruthless, and do not possess my intelligence.

"For that reason I doubt if you can understand what happened in the innermost depths of my psyche to cause the physical split in my schizophrenic condition.

"Suffice to say, I completely alienated the two halves of my natures, by blotting out all thought or awareness of my second half. This was where the will power was necessary. I concentrated, at white-hot heat for three months, on the one idea that my second nature was non-existent. Thus I eventually forced you from my conscious mind, into my subconscious. Then I administered the drug which I procured from the Viennese brain specialist before entering the sanitarium. It created a physical extension of my subconscious, which had to have another outlet since it was denied existence in my conscious mind by the power of my will*."

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* Anyone who has read Freud will understand the manner by which Colegrave built up the terrific, though artificial frustration in his mind. Since he was a schizophrenic, with two separate personalities, he created a tremendous repression in his subconscious by willing one out of existence.

A physical example of what Colegrave did would be in the case of a man who, with an extreme effort of will, denied himself even the thought of food or drink. In that case, if this were carried to its conclusion, the man would certainly die. Colegrave "killed" his secondary nature by denying its existence absolutely.

This "death" was in the form of a mighty repression which built up pressure day by day, just as a hot water boiler might. Then when the ultimate repression was reached something had to give. In Colgrave's case, by the aid of strange drugs, a physical manifestation of his subconscious was created. The drugs might possibly be those of Indian origin which are responsible for schizoid transformation in small animals. It was from a base of this type that the fictional transformation of Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde was supposed to have been effected.—ED.

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"Well," Colegrave's subconscious manifestation shrugged eloquently, "if you say so, it's okay with me. All I want to know is where do we go from here."

Colegrave smiled again.

"That is really the important question, isn't it? When you materialized I gave you certain instructions. Have you carried them out?"

"Yep," the little man nodded. "I've got a place rented, and I've found the town you wanted me to look up. It's a big place in the Middle West. The situation there is perfect."

Colegrave lighted a cigarette and inhaled luxuriously.

"Fine. All my life I regarded schizophrenia as a curse, but now I will show the world a practical use for it. A very practical use."

He glanced out of the window at the buildings and houses which were increasing in frequency as they neared the metropolitan area. A smile hovered over his lips. A gloating, anticipatory smile. . . .

A WEEK later Colegrave, immaculately attired in a conservative gray suit, approached the receptionist in an office labeled simply: *Ruzzoni Enterprises.*

"My name is Colegrave," he said to the receptionist's inquiring glance. "I should like to see Mr. Ruzzoni."

"Do you have an appointment?"

Colegrave smiled frostily.

"No. But I think he'll see me. Tell him it's regarding the indictment the district attorney and mayor of your delightful town are bringing against him."

The receptionist scrambled to her feet and, with one puzzled glance at Colegrave's imperturbable figure, disappeared through a heavy oak door.

She returned several minutes later.

"Mr. Ruzzoni will see you," she murmured. "Go right in."

"Thank you," Colegrave smiled. Then he sauntered through the oak door which had been left ajar, into a sumptuously furnished office. In the center of the room was a magnificent mahogany desk, fully eight feet long, and behind it hunched a fat, dark-skinned man with an unlighted cigar jammed into his face.

"Mr. Ruzzoni, I presume," Colegrave said sarcastically.

"It ain't nobody else," the man behind the desk snapped.

His wicked black eyes glittered balefully and his hands balled into straining fists. Colegrave knew at a glance that the man was laboring under a terrific nervous tension.

"Well, whadda you want?" Ruzzoni rasped. "Are you from the D. A.'s office?"

Colegrave closed the door carefully behind him. Then he seated himself before the imposing desk, crossed his legs and lighted a cigarette.

"I am not from the district attorney's office," he said calmly. "I represent no one but myself. And I think I might be able to help you."

Ruzzoni rose to his feet, his face flushing dangerously.

"What kind of a gag is this?" he demanded harshly. "If you think you—"

Colegrave raised one slim hand protestingly.

"You are in trouble, are you not?" he asked quietly. "I think you are very stupid not to investigate any means which might help you."

"I don't believe in boy scouts," Ruzzoni sneered. "Nobody's goin' to help me!"

"Maybe," Colegrave said, blowing a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling, "and maybe not. I am not a boy scout. What I can do for you will be very expensive.

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And nothing is too hot for me."

Ruzzoni settled back in his chair, a puzzled frown on his swarthy features.

"I'm listening," he said perkily. "But I ain't talking, see? I ain't dumb enough to fall into that kind of a trap."

"IN THE first place," Colegrave said cheerfully. "As things stand you are slated for a long trip to prison, and possibly a detour to the chair if things turn up which shouldn't turn up."

Ruzzoni swallowed painfully and a band of beaded perspiration circled his brow.

"The district attorney and the mayor," Colegrave went on, "are after you, Ruzzoni, and they've got the goods on you. You've been running the organized graft and gambling in this town for eight years, and they figure that's about long enough. If they get an indictment against you, you're heading for the chair. When one witness spills his story, it'll start them all talking.

"The only possible out for you is to eliminate the mayor and the district attorney in such a way that no suspicion falls on you. Then, in the chaos that will result, you can move some men you control on the judicial benches into the offices of the mayor and district attorney. It will be a simple matter then to squash the indictment. Don't you agree that it's a sensible plan?"

"It's lovely," Ruzzoni snapped bitterly. "But who's goin' to commit suicide by trying to rub out the mayor and D. A.? Even if he did get 'em, he wouldn't have a chance to get away. I've offered my own boys as high as fifty grand, but they won't touch it. The bunch of yellow rats!"

"I'll handle that end of things," Colegrave said softly. "But it's going to cost you exactly one million dollars."

"You're crazy," Ruzzoni cried. "There ain't that much money in this whole town!"

Colegrave stood up.

"I'm not here to haggle," he said coldly. "A million—in cash. I'll collect after I do the job."

"After you do the job?" Ruzzoni said craftily. "Well that's a little different. I think we can make a deal."

"Don't bank on my not being here to collect it," Colegrave said mirthlessly. "I have a habit of keeping dates. I'll meet you here the day after his honor and the district attorney keep their date with the gentleman with the scythe. Is that agreeable with you?"

Ruzzoni licked his lips.

"Yeah, it's okay by me."

"Fine," Colegrave said smoothly. "I've drawn up something in the nature of a contract for you to sign. Just a little precaution in case you forget our little deal after I do the job. I wouldn't like you to be troubled with amnesia when I come around to collect. An incriminating paper in my possession would prevent anything like that."

"I ain't signing nothin'," Ruzzoni snarled. "How do I know you're on the level?"

"You don't," Colegrave said quietly. "It's a chance you're going to take. Of course, if you prefer not to take that chance—"

He shrugged his shoulders and started for the door.

"Wait!" Ruzzoni cried. "I—I'll string along."

Colegrave smiled and pulled a paper from his breast pocket.

"Just sign this, please. . ."

THREE days later Theodore Colegrave paused before the imposing edifice of the city hall, glanced casually up and down the street, before turning to the small, grim looking man who was with him.

"Quite sure of things, aren't you?"

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he asked quietly.

The little man—the physical manifestation of Colegrave's duality—nodded.

"The mayor and the district attorney are together now examining witnessess for the Ruzzoni hearing. I get into the office with my fake message and plug 'em both. Then I either get shot or captured on the spot. Right?"

"Right," Colegrave said. "And be sure and not miss. There's a million dollars hanging on the accuracy of your shots."

"I won't miss," Colegrave's secondary nature promised. "This is the kind of thing I enjoy doing."

"Then get going, Colegrave. And good luck."

"Thanks."

Colegrave turned and, without a backward glance, strolled off down the street. A block from the city hall he increased his pace until he had covered a half mile. Then he turned into a restaurant and ordered a glass of wine.

"And bring me the next edition of the afternoon paper," he told the waiter who took his order.

As he sipped his wine he went over his scheme step by step and could find no flaws. It was a masterful plan, he was forced to admit. His secondary self would commit the assassination and receive the penalty. Thus he, Colegrave, would be rid of his schizophrenic double, and, at the same time, he would be earning a million cool dollars from the vice lord, Ruzzoni. And that would be only the start. With a million dollars in his power, and forever rid of his dual nature, there were no heights to which he might not aspire.

He had no compunction about the fact that his subconscious double would be eliminated forever. Just as his secondary nature had no qualms about sacrificing his physical life.

It was the really choice part of his plan. The two natures acting independently to advance the single unit. No possible suspicion could ever fall on him for his part in the crime. The double murder would be attributed to a crazed madman, and after the assassin was killed, the affair would be forgotten.

Colegrave drank his wine with relish and ordered another glass. He was a brilliant man, there was no doubt of that.

Forty five minutes later the waiter came rushing to his table with a copy of a paper on which the ink was still damp.

"Will yuh look at that?" he cried, spreading the paper on Colegrave's table. The headline read:

MAYOR AND D.A. KILLED BY ASSASSIN'S BULLETS. KILLER CAPTURED WITHOUT STRUGGLE

"Terrible, isn't it?" Colegrave murmured.

Then he finished his drink, picked up his change and sauntered out of the restaurant.

THE next morning Ruzzoni paid off. If there was any thought of a double-cross in his mind, it was dispelled when Colegrave informed him that the incriminating contract was locked in a safety deposit vault, with instructions to disclose the contents if he should meet with any violent accident.

"I'm paying off," he said grinning. "It's worth it to me, in the first place, and I can't get out of it in the second place. With the mayor and the D.A. out of the way, that indictment is a thing of the past. I'm in the clear and in the saddle from now on in."

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"One thing you can do for me," Colegrave said as he was leaving. "Arrange it for me to see this fellow that did the job for me."

"I've been wondering about him," Ruzzoni said softly, "What's to prevent him from singing? He must've been an awful chump to take the chance he did, but still he might be bright enough to start poping off what he knows."

"That's just it," Colegrave smiled. "He doesn't know anything at all. Even if he did I doubt if he'd talk."

"It's your neck if he does," Ruzzoni said. "I'll arrange for you to see him. They'll rush through his trial, but I'll get you an interview with him the day of the frying party. It shouldn't be more than a few weeks off."

ONE month later Colegrave was admitted into a barred, heavily-guarded room, in which a small, surly looking man sat hunched on a stool. The head of the man was shaved and his trouser legs were split. When he saw Colegrave his ugly yellow teeth showed in a grin.

"Everything's jake, isn't it?" he asked.

"Be careful of what you say," Colegrave murmured. "Yes, everything's jake. The last act takes place tonight when the part of me that is you dies. It is strange that I must die to live, but that is the fact."

Little more was said. When Colegrave left some minutes later, he felt he was leaving a part of himself. But this thought only elated him. It was part of himself that he could well do without, now that its usefulness was over. It was like a man with a withered arm having it amputated. With the death of his subconscious manifestation, he would be free forever to live his own life, with the position and power that his money would assure him.

At twelve o'clock that night Colegrave was seated in a smart night club, formally attired in evening clothes, a magnum of the finest quality champagne set before him.

Sweet strains of music floated through the smoke-laden air, and the dulcet laughter of pretty girls caressed his ears.

This was the life that would be his to enjoy completely in just exactly—he glanced at his watch—two more minutes.

The execution was scheduled for 12:03.

He poured himself a drink of the sparkling wine and lighted a cigarette. In a minute and a half he would be released forever from all worries. He watched the second hand of his wrist watch complete one circle and start on the next. Just a matter of seconds now . . .

As the second hand started on the last quarter of the minute, Colegrave rose to his feet, glass in hand. It was only fitting that he drink a toast to the exit of his secondary nature.

He was raising his glass as the second hand swept past 12:03.

"A toast to one who—"

They were his last words.

A bolt of white-hot pain seemed to crash into his brain, even as the words echoed in his ears.* The glass in his hand splintered as his hand closed spasmodically, and the wine splashed over his shirt front.

Then he crashed to the floor.

* What Colegrave, for all his cleverness, didn't realize, was that his own subconscious mind would be shattered in the electric chair. When he accomplished the physical cleavage between his dual personality, his own subconscious intellect activated the body of his secondary nature. Thus when the electric current shot through the body of the mayor and the district attorney's assassin, it was the mind of Colegrave that was destroyed by the bolt.—Ed.

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A woman screamed, and the music jerked to a ragged stop. A crowd clustered about Colegrave's lifeless figure, until the manager arrived and had the body carried to his office.

Then the police were called.

The coroner called it a heart attack, although he said it should more accurately be called a mind attack. The tissues of the brain were seared and shattered into shapeless shreds.

From the standpoint of the police there was one very fortunate angle to the mysterious death. For, when a certain safety deposit box corporation learned of it, they handed to the guardians of the law a document which convicted beyond all doubt a certain Mr. Ruzzoni as being behind the double killing of the mayor and the district attorney.

Ruzzoni, however, saved the state a job by committing suicide while the police were smashing in the door of his apartment.

THE END

IMAGINE PAIN IN AN AMPUTATED LEG

FOR many years now, medicos have been puzzled by the peculiar phenomenon common to those who have had a leg or an arm amputated. Many of these surgical cases occasionally claim to "feel" pain in the missing limb. More recently, however, a French physician, Dr. R. Molinery (not heard from since Vichy), after much research, believes that dreams, in the subconscious mind, keep alive the picture of the complete body.

It is explained that the subconscious, in constructing its dream memories of a complete body, makes what seems like a pain or other sensation, occasionally received over the cut fibers, to appear to come from a part of the body that is really a figment of the imagination.

THE TEST OF DUST!

From which man after man failed to return. . . . A jealous governor . . . a brilliant scientist who knew men could retreat backward to simpler forms of life . . . his daughter, for whose matchless charms man after man had attempted the Test of Dust, only to disappear . . . these form the background of MADEMOISELLE BUTTERFLY by Don Wilcox. . . . Louis Ribot knew the danger. . . . He had seen the silver and blue clad suitor on the scientist's island, knew the man had disappeared . . . and he saw the silver and blue synthetic butterfly dry its wings and fly. . . . But Mademoiselle Butterfly was beautiful. Ribot was in love. . . . The Test of Dust was before him. . . . Read MADEMOISELLE BUTTERFLY, one of the six great stories featured in the big

MAY ISSUE

Fantastic ADVENTURES

ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS MARCH 20

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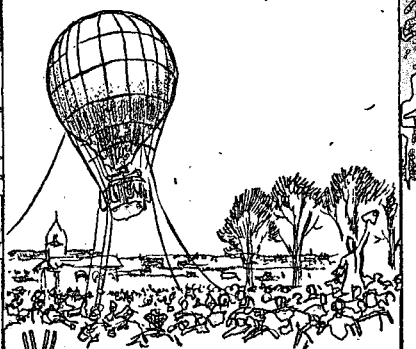
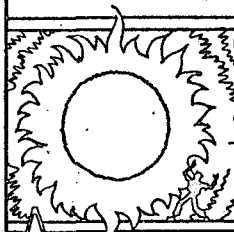
IT WAS SOME 250 YEARS AFTER PARACELSUS OBTAINED HYDROGEN THAT CAVENDISH EXPLAINED ITS PROPERTIES; BOTH GOT IT THE SAME WAY—BY TREATING METALS WITH MINERAL ACIDS. JUST 160 YEARS AGO CAVENDISH PROVED WHAT EVERY SCHOOLBOY KNOWS; THAT WATER IS HYDROGEN AND OXYGEN. . .

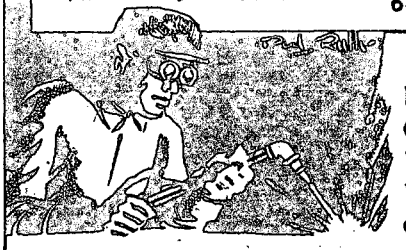


VAST THRONGS JAMMED THE CHAMP DE MARS, PARIS, IN AUGUST, 1783, TO WATCH THE WORLD'S FIRST HYDROGEN-FILLED BALLOON ASCEND. IT ROSE 3,000 FEET, DRIFTED 15 MILES. WHEN IT DESCENDED, ALARMED FRENCH PEASANTS ATTACKED IT WITH PITCHFORKS THINKING IT SOME STRANGE BEAST!

MANY MODERN SCIENTISTS SAY THAT ALL THE ELEMENTS ARE REALLY COMPOUNDS OF HYDROGEN. SIMPLEST OF ALL SUBSTANCES, HYDROGEN IS FOUND IN VAPOROUS DISCHARGES OF VOLCANOS, OIL AND GAS WELLS; IT IS PRESENT IN WATER, ALL ACIDS, MOST ORGANISMS. HYDROGEN IS 256,000 TIMES LIGHTER THAN PLATINIRIDIUM, WORLD'S HEAVIEST ELEMENT!



FLAMES OF INCANDESCENT HYDROGEN SOMETIMES 185,000 MILES HIGH ARE SHOT OUT FROM THE SUN!



AN INDUSTRIAL "BIG SHOT." HYDROGENATION IS A MODERN PROCESS THAT CHANGES LIQUID OILS TO SOLIDS FOR SOAP, CANDLE AND EDIBLE FAT MAKERS; IT REMOVES ODOR FROM WHALE OIL, DESTROYS TASTE OF COD LIVER OIL, TRANSFORMS WASTE PETROLEUM INTO GASOLINE. THE HOT OXY-HYDROGEN FLAME IS A WELDER AND METAL-CUTTER PAR EXCELLENCE.

HYDROGEN is number 1 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is H and its atomic weight is 1.008. It is a gas, colorless, tasteless, odorless. Its specific gravity is 0.06949, therefore is 14.39 times as light as air. In liquid form it boils at —252°. It freezes to a white solid at —259°. It is used for inflating balloons, converting oils into solid fats, synthesis of ammonia, and as fuel. Combines with chlorine, bromine, etc., as chlorides, bromides, etc.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Iodine

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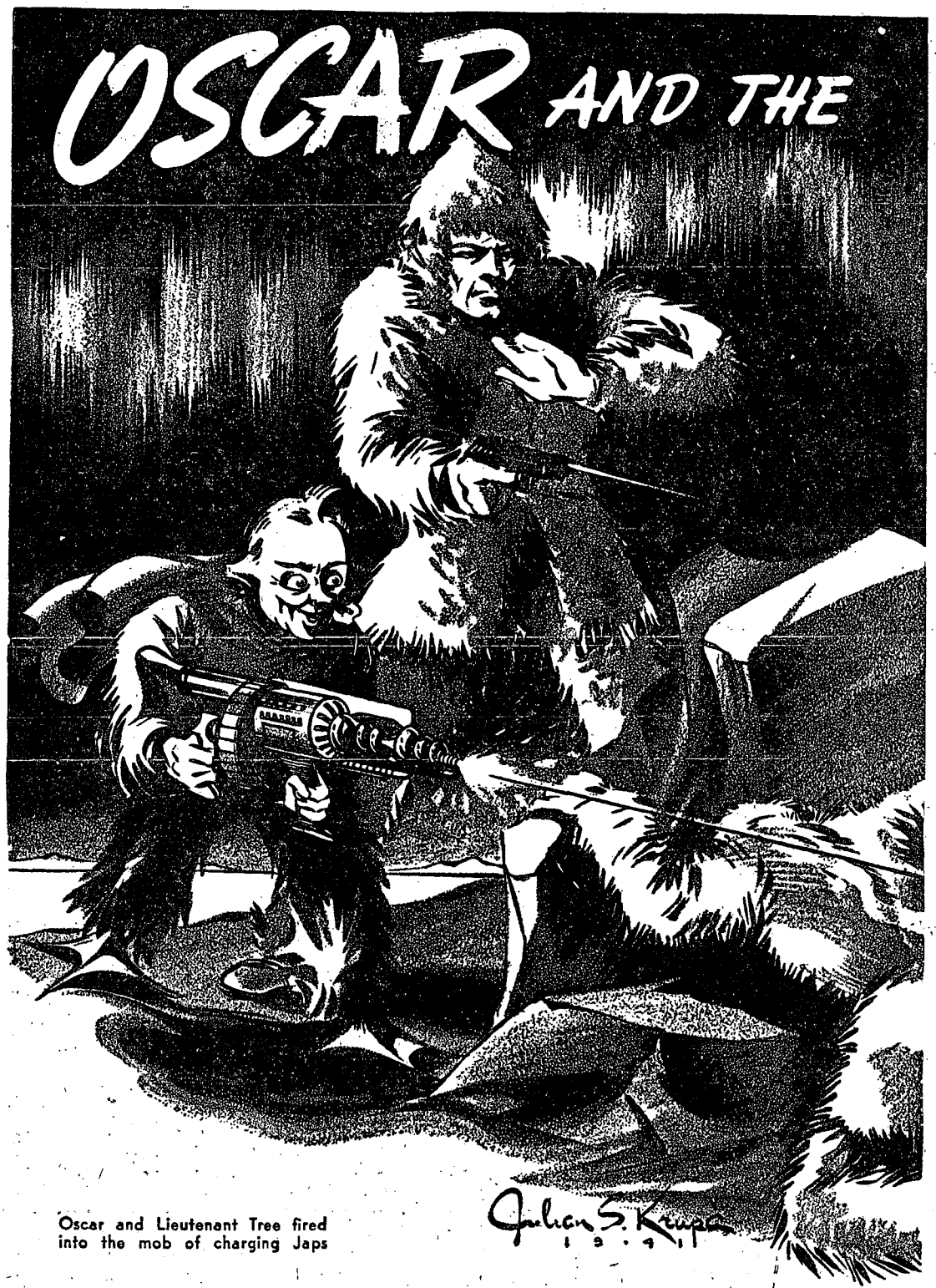

Oscar and Lieutenant Tree fired into the mob of charging Japs

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TALKING TOTEMS

by JAMES NORMAN

It took all the other-world science of Oscar, the Martian detective to combat the dastardly Jap plot that lay behind these innocent totem poles in Alaska

I WAS uneasy and worried as I stood in the passenger lounge of the Alaska-bound *S. S. Vancouver*. For an instant my eyes swept through the port windows, across the wallowing ship's deck to the old slaty swells of the Bering Sea. Off in the distance rose the foreboding rocks of Cape Romanof and beyond that, in the unseen immensity of the frigid North—Nome.

I sighed anxiously, realizing my problem was one which might never bother an Earthman as long as he remains tied to his own planet. You see, I am from another world. I am an alien creature, not even a human. You've probably read about it in the papers. It caused

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quite a fuss in Washington, D. C., and it still has the best minds in the State Department in an awful dither. . . . I, Oscar the Detective of Mars, am being deported!

You may wonder why? If you read the papers, you'll recall how the press eulogized me. Mass demonstrations were staged in cities from New York to Seattle in my favor, for the American people really loved me and were prepared to defend me in my moment of peril.

Newspapers ran full length color pictures of my penguin-shaped, four foot, five inch body. They described what a dapper little Martian I was. They made a great play over my salmon pink skin, my conical ears, my pertly flared tulip nose and my feather clothing—black tails, white vest and front which I can take off like an evening suit. They reviewed my exploits as a detective: the Zombie case; the Indian Amnesia case; always giving my tulip nose full credit.

But now my deportation—how did it happen? Well, though I sometimes think of Mars in a nostalgic way, I like Earth and America. So I applied for U. S. citizenship. It was at this point the belated discovery was made by immigration authorities that I had entered the country illegally. You may remember how I appeared on this planet. Hodar the Magician, during one of his shows in Manhattan, prepared to pull a chorus girl from a hat on the stage but instead, I came out.

Well, nobody seemed to mind it except the State Department; for it was discovered that there is no quota of immigration for Martians. Technically I was subject to deportation. Even Congress was sorry for this oversight but the law was the law in spite of the fact that many important figures stepped forward to vouch for me. Even Orson Welles put in a word, though I am a little suspicious of Orson.

Since I couldn't be deported back into a hat, a mere stage prop, I was instructed to go to Alaska and make a regular application for re-entry into the States. Hodar, whom I hold partially responsible for my being on Earth, now accompanied me on my voyage into exile. His loyalty, however, didn't relieve me of my worries; for up to this very moment I had heard nothing from the State Department. Little did I know that my personal troubles would soon be overshadowed by a greater danger which would drastically affect my position as an exile and plunge me into a most amazing series of adventures.

It began when something plucked at my arm as I stood in the ship's lounge. I turned, facing Higgins, our cabin steward. Instantly my sensitive tulip nose which probes into human glandular odors and reads them as if they were voices, told me that something was wrong.

HIGGINS' adrenals, the fear glands, were overworking. That was very evident in the way he snatched at my sleeve and peered at me with oddly bloodshot eyes. "Pardon me, sir," he spoke anxiously. "I read about you. You're really Oscar the Detective?"

"That's me," I replied.

"You solve cases by chemistry? You know about gases, maybe?"

"My Martian brain," I answered, preening myself modestly, "is a mechanism capable of reducing all nature to simple chemical formulae. What is it?"

The man hesitated, his eyes shifting about worriedly. Then he whispered: "I've run into something queer down in the D hold. Would you come down and look?"

"Now?"

"No. In fifteen minutes. I'll be

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waiting there for you." Higgins' eyes abruptly flooded with combined fear and suspicion when he saw Captain Follett enter the lounge. He muttered something under his breath about gases and hurried away.

Right then and there I had what you Americans call a hunch. I knew a case was brewing—the kind I shine in. It wasn't what Higgins told me, but what his glands said, that put me on the alert. I tried to catch Hodar's attention.

Hodar was at the far end of the lounge, giving an impromptu show for the passengers who now sat open-mouthed, watching his wrist flick and turn an ordinary table cloth into a brilliant fluttering Union Jack. He was tall and well poised and his engaging personality was always at its best before an audience.

"Now," he said, flinging his black cloak over his arm to indicate the performance was almost ended, "Are there any special tricks or illusions the ladies and gentlemen wish to see? Only one. Which is it? The Indian rope trick? Cards?"

He glanced at the first row of chairs, his eyes twinkling from Karl Bowen, the eminent arctic explorer and scientist, to Jane Lee, a pretty, blonde American girl on her way to Alaska to be married. "How about it, Miss Lee?" Hodar smiled.

The girl shook her head and blushed. "Ask Mr. Quest," she suggested.

Hodar glanced at the rather quiet, mild-mannered young man on her left.

"How about producing Hitler so we can dunk him in the sea?" the young man asked.

"Ah, Ah," said Hodar. "That's Churchill's job, not ours. He'll probably get dunked anyway."

Bowen, the explorer, looked up. "You're a magician," he said. "Why not produce the *aurora borealis?*"

"The Northern Lights," laughed Hodar. "Well, I don't know. Perhaps they're out of season. Furthermore, I doubt if I could produce them on the scale you're accustomed to. I'm just an ordinary magician. Now, if I were a god, I'd say 'presto, Northern Lights.' I'd wave my wand like this and. . . ."

Hodar's voice faltered. His hand froze in midair and he stared in fascinated amazement toward the northern windows of the lounge.

"Good God—he's done it!" someone shouted.

A dozen people came to their feet and their expressions ranged from outright shock to incredulous wonder. A buxom lady took one look at the windows and fell over in a dead faint, crushing a chair in the process. Then came an instant of frigid silence. Karl Bowen's voice broke through it with naked force.

"The *borealis!*" he gasped. "It's impossible!"

BEYOND the lounge windows the sky flooded with strange eldritch lights. They flared up suddenly; an eerie, tortuous glow bathing the dull sea and heaven in a way that made the blood in one's veins run cold. Then they vanished almost as quickly and abruptly as they had come.

Hodar was the first to recover his self control. "Lord Almighty," he whispered in a strained voice. "I didn't do that. I couldn't have. I'm no magician; I'm a showman."

"Those were the lights," said Captain Follett.

"Pretty slick trick, I'd say!" It was Meung, a French-Canadian passenger speaking. He glared at Hodar coldly, almost malevolently. He was a thin, hook-nosed professional gambler with a spiked black moustache. He disliked Hodar intensely for the latter had

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showed him a thing or two with cards on our first day out.

"Listen," Hodar said angrily, "If I—"

His threat was never finished for an ominous booming sound swelled in the distance. It shook the very sky and sea with its tremendous concussion. The ship's fixtures rattled and danced like mad. I could sense the fear that leaped into the passengers as they stared at each other and reached frantically for support while the ship tossed as though caught in the iron grip of some unseen tidal force.

"We're being torpedoed!" someone screamed.

People rushed out on deck. Some grabbed up life preservers; others fought for a place near the boats. Captain Follett's voice cut through the confusion and, after a few tense seconds, calmed the passengers by its sheer force. "I want order!" he roared. "We're not being torpedoed. We don't know what's happened. Just stand by!"

A junior officer raced down the bridge ladder to the Captain's side. His face was white and tensed. "Tidal wave, Sir," he reported. "That's all we can make out. Seems to have been a volcanic explosion in the sea, some distance ahead. Mr. Clark wants to know if we should change course?"

"Blasted no!" said the Captain. "We'll investigate."

Karl Bowen came up. "Those lights we saw weren't Northern Lights," he said quickly. "I tell you, there's something wrong. The *aurora borealis* are never accompanied by sound or tidal reactions."

"How long a time passed between the lights and the sound?" I cut in.

"A little more than three minutes," said Bowen.

Hodar and the Captain nodded in agreement.

"Okay," I said. "Computing the relative speed of sound and light plus the interval of difference between them, I'd say the source of those lights and the explosions is about forty-four miles or so. Sound travels about one mile in five seconds. Where would that be, Captain Follett?"

"It could be anywhere. The mainland or, directly ahead, St. Lawrence Island."

"But it can't be," Bowen protested. "There are no volcanic formations in the island. And the few volcanoes on the mainland within that distance are all extinct."

A commotion on deck interrupted us. My eyes swept toward the companionway ladder to witness a startling scene.

Higgins, the cabin steward, lurched out upon deck drunkenly. His face was beet-red as he stumbled forward. He was laughing in a high-pitched, uncontrollable manner that sent a queer chill running up my spine.

"Higgins!" snapped Follett.

"G-G-Hold . . . gas ha . . . ha . . ."

I stared at the man for laughter, when it is uncontrolled and hysterical, when it has a thread of madness coursing through it, becomes an unnerving sound. The steward's voice scaled to a screeching pitch as he staggered toward us. "Gasss . . . ha . . . ha . . ." His voice suddenly shattered upon a high note. He stiffened abruptly, then collapsed on the deck.

It was then that my sensitive nose caught another mystifying odor—but I'll explain this later.

CHAPTER II

Murder

JANE LEE stepped through the doorway of my cabin and glanced sym-

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pathetically toward the bed where we had placed the unconscious steward. "Can I help at all?" she asked. "I'm a trained nurse. At least I was."

I smiled and my ductless glands let out a polite and appreciative little secretion—a reaction I simply can't curb when I see a pretty Earth girl. "Please," I said, "You might look after Higgins until the doctor comes."

Captain Follett had been standing by, fuming. "What's wrong with Higgins?" he demanded. "Never seen the man act like that. Good solid man, Higgins."

"I've got my suspicions—chemicals!" I murmured.

Then to everyone's puzzlement, I busied myself at the cabin washbasin where I soaked two towels in water and wrung them half dry, then sprinkled a little brandy on each. I gave one to Hodar, the other to Follett. "Wrap these around your face, covering your mouth and nose. Breathe through them," I explained. "We're visiting the D hold."

At the bottom of the D hold I flashed my pocket torch around, letting the beam slice through the stygian darkness and stuffiness. The place was filled with drums and heavy tins. They creaked and scraped with the motion of the ship. Walking along the narrow passageway, I clucked appreciatively, reading the labels painted on the cargo.

"Nitric acid. Sulphuric acid. Eh!"

Then I saw what I was looking for—a few tins of ammonium nitrate which had fallen across a high pressure steam pipe that ran through the hold. My sensitive nose fluttered like humming bird wings. To my right I heard Hodar and the Captain begin giggling.

Instantly, I knew what was wrong in the hold—nitrous oxide! The tins of ammonium nitrate had spilled upon the intensely hot steam pipes. An oxidation had occurred. The result was simple laughing gas!

"Get back on deck, quick!" I shouted at Hodar. An overdose could seriously affect their nervous systems as it had done to poor Higgins.

As for myself, I remained. Laughing gas doesn't affect me as it does Earthmen. I didn't giggle and get high. Instead, my glands let out an almost uncontrollable series of sweet smelling sympathetic odors—chuckles, to be exact. You see, until my appearance on Earth, I had never used sounds for speech. Martians use odors. Having perfect control of every gland in our penguin-shaped bodies, we convey thoughts by odor frequencies. But you have to have a nose and a body like mine for this.

I whipped out a pencil and pad and began scribbling in Martian *swifthand*, a much faster, scientifically designed method of speedwriting than your various shorthands. What did I write down there in the hold? You'd be surprised. The nitrous oxide was saying things to me—comic gags. I wrote them down with the intention of sending them to my good friend, Bob Hope.

I also made myself a memo suggesting the compilation of a lexicon of odors and a key to it so that professional humorists and gagmen in the future might explore the rich storehouse of humor—nitrous oxide.

UPON deck, I found Hodar and Captain Follett recovered from their experience in the cargo hold. Hodar shot me a funny glance, saying, "What the devil is it all about, Oscar? I feel as much in the dark as a couple of diplomats shooting with cold dice in a pitch black room."

"You tell me," I said. "We're on a case but this time we're in it before it's really started. I can't actually tell

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what's in the air. Still, just the fact that this ship is crammed with nitric and sulphuric acids puts me in a queer frame of mind."

"The cargo?" asked Captain Follett. "It's for delivery to the Seward Import Company. What's so queer about that?"

"Just one thing," I replied. "I've been reading up on Alaska. Chemicals used in the mining industry there are brought in in small amounts. Nothing like this. Who wants these chemicals and why? The Eskimos don't eat them."

A bell rang on the ship's bridge and at the same instant there came a piercing scream from the direction of my cabin. "It's the girl!" I cried. "Come on!" I raced along the uneven deck, banging once into an air-vent funnel and cursing aloud with a none too pretty string of Martian odor-oaths. I knew that I shouldn't have left Jane Lee alone with the unconscious steward.

Bursting into the cabin, I saw her crumpled upon the floor in a pitiful sobbing heap. In one hand she clutched a brandy glass, the contents of which had spilled over the carpet. I breathed a sigh of relief when we finally lifted her to a chair and found her unhurt.

"What happened?" I asked as her eyes fluttered open.

The girl's stare was fraught with horror. Her cheeks were deathly pale and her small warm lips trembled as she glanced across the cabin to the bed. My eyes followed hers, then I stiffened. At the same moment, a violent glandular odor assailed my flared nose. The odor of death!

"Higgins!" said Hodar.

"Stone dead!" cut in Captain Follett.

I came to the bedside and took a look at the man. There was a dark sticky blotch on his forehead and the back of his head had been ripped out. "Murdered—," I said slowly. "Shot at close range through the forehead. The gun shot was muffled by this pillow wrapped around the weapon." I stooped and picked up an empty shell from the floor.

"Here's the gun," cried Hodar. He pointed at a Webley service automatic which lay on its right side upon a small table near the door. The gun hadn't been there when we brought Higgins into the cabin.

"Don't touch it, yet," I ordered. I turned to Jane Lee. She was still pale and shaken but she stared at me clear eyed. "So, what happened?" I asked her.

Her lips quivered again. "It's terrible, horrible," she said in a low, halting voice. "It's my fault. I shouldn't have left him alone."

"You left the cabin?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes," said Jane. "I felt the man needed a stimulant so I ran to the bar for some brandy. I was only gone a minute. When I returned he was. . . ."

"Murdered!" put in Captain Follett.

"There was brandy right here in the cabin," I said pointing to a table near the bed.

Jane Lee's eyes widened when she saw the brandy flask which Hodar and I kept in our cabin as a sort of precaution against the weather. "No. I didn't see it," she cried. "Oh, I wish I had."

CAPTAIN FOLLETT crossed in front of the girl and looked down at her sternly. "What's to prove the brandy spilled on the carpet wasn't from this flask?" he asked. "Miss Lee, can anyone prove you went to the bar? The bartender?"

A look of new terror came into the girl's blue eyes. "Anyone see me?" she whispered. "No. Why no! The bartender wasn't there. I just took the brandy. I had to hurry."

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Captain Follett grunted doubtfully and swerved his attention to where I was breaking open the clip of the murder gun and counting the bullets. I nodded toward him.

"This is it, Captain," I said. "One shell gone."

Suddenly I raised the murder weapon to my nose, taking a long careful sniff as people do just before they're about to sneeze. But I didn't sneeze. I was detecting.

"Needn't bother about fingerprints," I said. "This gun was held by a gloved hand when it was fired. Leather odor on it. Pigskin to be exact."

I handed the gun to Captain Follett.

"Okay, Captain," I said. "Please hold this gun as if you were going to shoot it, then put it on the table exactly as we found it. Remember, exactly!"

"What?" The Captain looked mystified.

"Just a little curiosity of mine," I murmured.

Captain Follett agreed. He twirled the gun in his right hand, aimed it for an instant, glanced at me in puzzlement and set the weapon upon the table on its left side. I had Hodar repeat the performance. Finally I handed the gun to Jane Lee. I watched closely as she took the gun in her right hand, held it gingerly for a second before setting it down in exactly the same position as Captain Follett and Hodar had done.

"What's this nonsense about," Follett demanded. "Give me that gun. I'll have it traced."

"Don't bother," I said. "My nose has already informed me of the owner."

"You know?" Follett and the girl looked at me amazed.

"Sure I know—Karl Bowen, the explorer!" I said. "Hodar, you and I are going to pay Bowen a visit. And Captain, I'd rather you didn't come. I'll report to you later."

IN THE B deck passageway I raised my hand to rap on a stateroom door when Hodar called my attention to the nameplate, "Meung." For the hundredth time I rued the fact that everything on Earth, including stateroom door nameplates and ships bars, are designed for six foot earth men and not four foot Martians.

"Pardon my inches," I murmured when Meung the Gambler opened the door and glared at me. I promptly removed myself another door down the passage and knocked.

The door, this time, was opened by Bowen himself. He was a medium height man. He looked older than his fifty years, his friendly face worn by the hardship of years spent in the Arctic.

"How's the cabin steward? Recovered?" he asked as Hodar and I entered.

"In a way," I murmured. Then, as the door was shut, I quickly explained that murder had been committed aboard ship. Bowen listened without saying a word until I came to the unpleasant business—the gun.

"My gun!" he gasped. "But I have my gun. I saw it in my case only an hour or two ago. And I've been in my stateroom ever since I left you with Higgins. He was alive then."

"Well, Bowen," I said. "I was pretty sure you didn't fire that gun. But who came in here and stole your gun?"

"Nobody," replied the explorer. He hastily threw his traveling bag upon the bed, unlatched it and rummaged among some clothing. Finally he pulled out a Webley service automatic.

"Great guns! Twins!" Hodar murmured.

I took the Webley, slipped out the cartridge clip and found it full. "Are you sure this is yours?" I demanded.

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Bowen looked perplexed. "Well . . . that's strange," he said. "My gun wasn't loaded."

"Naturally, because it isn't yours," I said. "To make sure we can check on the serial numbers. This automatic was planted here recently," —Again I sniffed at the gun but this time I jerked my nose away as if it had been stung. For a moment I gasped and snorted violently. "Gasoline! . . . The gun's been dipped in gasoline to destroy all personal identifying odors. Very clever indeed!"

"What?" Hodar cut in.

"Just what I said," I repeated. "We're working against an amazingly clever criminal. A man who took my detecting ability into account when he planned his crime. He planted this odor-free gun here so Karl Bowen wouldn't be alarmed upon discovering his own Webley automatic missing. After the crime, the murderer probably intended stealing his own gun back. We weren't expected to search Bowen for his gun so quickly. But the murderer make one mistake. I traced the murder gun to Bowen by smell instead of through police or manufacturer's records. That should have been dipped in gasoline also. Then we wouldn't have questioned Bowen for some days yet."

"But why was the steward murdered?" asked Hodar.

"Because I think he knew too much. His death is but a symptom of a bigger case. A case with chemicals in it. *I'm sure of this because I know who shot him!*"

"You've discovered that already? But how?"

I shook my head. "It won't do to reveal the murderer yet," I said. "There's more than one man in this. Our job is to be on the alert. Let's get back to our cabin."

THE cabin had become quite crowded since our departure. When we returned with Bowen, we found that the Captain had gone while the ship's doctor and young Mr. Quest had come in. It was Quest who surprised us.

He was no longer the young, unassuming young man who had followed Jane Lee around like a puppy, despite the fact that she was engaged to still another in Nome. He had changed. He looked hard and efficient. His chilly gray eyes stabbed at us, each in turn.

"I'm Quest," he said. "Lieutenant James Quest of the CRMP."

"The Canadian Mounteds," said Hodar in surprise.

Quest nodded. "I'm taking over," he said. "This is a Canadian ship. A Canadian has been murdered."

"That isn't all—," said a voice behind Quest. It was Captain Follett. Something strange had happened to him. He leaned against the door and looked at us queerly, like a man who was punch-drunk. "The St. Lawrence Island is gone—gone out of the sea," he said harshly.

There were running footsteps outside on the deck, then voices, amazed shouts and more footsteps. The name, St. Lawrence, was repeated in a dozen incredible tones. Then a bell clanged up on the bridge.

In the cabin, everyone stared at Captain Follett as though he were mad. The St. Lawrence Island was the biggest stretch of land in the Bering Sea.

"Gone, you said!" Bowen finally broke the silence. The explorer's face went absolutely dead white.

CHAPTER III

Meung

THE first of the winter storms had blown through Nome. It had blan-

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keted Alaska from Fairbanks to Point Spencer with a ceaseless driving snow that extended even to the margins of the Seward Peninsula where a frigid tide rolled down direct from the frozen tip of the planet.

Death rode in the sub-zero wind that whined across the storied Nome beach. There were no ships now. The last, the *S. S. Vancouver,* was gone two days. Nome was snowbound, but Nome was also in a fervor of excitement.

The St. Lawrence Island had vanished completely. Nome's *Daily Clarion* blasted the news through the frozen city. There hadn't been a shred of word from the few hundred natives and the single trading post on the Bering Sea island. Two coast guard cutters had braved a stormy sea and came back to report that there was nothing left but a large wave-washed reef where the island had once been.

"Well, catastrophe is putting it mildly," observed Hodar as he, Lieutenant Quest and I sat in our hotel in Nome. "But I don't see where the island has anything to do with the murder case?"

"All right," said Quest. "You and Oscar have given me a bit of a hand as far as Bowen is concerned. I'll take you in on this. There may be more than just murder. Oscar ought to appreciate the connection. He's got an imagination."

"I hardly need imagination to know the island is gone," said Hodar. "We passed right by where it *wasn't.*"

Lieutenant Quest smiled. "But you don't know why I came aboard the ship in Vancouver?"

"Meung?" I asked.

Quest darted a surprised look at me. "How did you know?"

"Because you pretended not to know him aboard ship," I replied.

"Very well," said Quest. "But this business started with a secret meeting of international diplomats in Lisbon, Portugal. My government was interested in it for two reasons: Europe is at war; secondly, certain representatives of opposing nations came together in that meeting. Furthermore, the greater number of representatives came from nations which had only one thing in common—Arctic claims.

"Meung the gambler seemed to be a Canadian representative. We think he was acting for someone else. Now, we don't know what occurred at this meeting. Meung returned to Canada, crossed the country to Vancouver and caught the boat to Alaska. I was assigned to check up on his movements and contacts. Gambling is just his front."

"So you think Meung knows something about the lost island?" Hodar asked. "That's impossible. It takes big money to remove land. Look what the Panama Canal cost the U. S. Government. Think of the time and men it took."

I stood up suddenly, grabbing Hodar. "That's not our worry now," I said. "I think Meung needs a little investigating. While Quest keeps his eye on Bowen, you and I are going to pay a visit. And while I'm visiting, you're going to search Meung's quarters."

DOWNTOWN Nome was almost deserted when we went out. Footpaths had been cut around the snowdrifts that choked the crooked main street. Here and there we saw native dogs huddled in doorways, their thick fur billowing in the cutting wind. The town was dotted, almost every corner, with those grotesquely carved Alaskan totem poles.

One by one, as I passed them, I felt my heavy Martian skin creep over my

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bones. There was something about the totems that filled me with a queer inexpressible feeling—a sensation of danger. Suddenly, as I approached the sixth pole along the street I stopped, fascinated by the fantastic face carved upon the totem.

"Hodar," I said, "I'll swear that thing said something."

"The totem?" Hodar looked at me queerly. "Don't let them get you down, Oscar. They're just put up for the summer tourist trade."

I looked at the totem again. I was positive the thing had been trying to say something to me. Or was this the imagination Lieutenant Quest had commented on?

"Here's Meung's hangout. The Malemute Bar," said Hodar. "We part here, eh?"

The Malemute Bar was the biggest and toughest place in Nome. I realized that the instant I walked in, and I quickly forgot my worries about the totem poles. The Malemute hung heavy with smoke. Raucous voices and laughter rang out along the busy bar. To the right, miners and fishermen, white and native, crowded around roulette, faro and poker tables. A drunk played mechanically at a tin pan piano which was lined with whiskey glasses.

I caused quite a sensation when I pushed through the swinging doors and stood there in what appeared to be an evening suit. People don't often see a Martian with a tulip nose like mine. A couple of men grabbed for their drinks. Another man swore off the stuff for life and stumbled out of the bar mumbling: "Pink elephants are bad enough, but good god!"

I saw Meung at a poker table, his back to the wall. He was startled, seeing me in the Malemute. I immediately sauntered to the table and dropped into a vacant place. "Deal me in," I said. "I feel lucky today. Let's make it worth while. Draw with table stakes. Start with five hundred dollars."

The other players at the table sort of stiffened, glaring at me suspiciously. "That let's me out," said one. The other three players also folded up their cards.

"So, it looks like you and me," Meung said. He greedily watched the crisp green one hundred dollar bills I paid out for my stack of chips.

Sensing something unusual, the men and women in the cafe edged around our table. I caught a bit of uneasy murmuring, for tough as Nome's citizens were, they still liked fair play and in their eyes I was just a queer little tinhorn lined up against a-sharp.

The tune changed swiftly as the play began. The sourdoughs and breeds soon opened their eyes in amazement. From the start, I won. Slowly, the chips piled up on my side. In fact, I could hardly see over the top of them.

Meung didn't have a chance. I know poker too well. I'm a whizz at it. My sensitive nose caught and translated Meung's slightest nervous reaction. I read right through his poker face. My scientific comptometer-like brain calculated odds down to a hair's breadth. This time the gambler was up against it for still another reason—I was cheating also!

TIME after time I filled my hand with a pair, then three queens. How those queens came up fifteen times in a row is my secret. Gradually, as the chips drifted my way and as the angry glint in Meung's eyes turned to malevolent suspicion, I prepared for a climax.

The onlookers watched the table tensely, wolfishly. Table stakes such as these hadn't been seen since the

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goldrush days.

Meung watched me like a hawk as I dealt my surprise hand. I nursed the deck slowly; one card for Meung, one card for me, one for Meung. With deliberate slowness I partially concealed the deck with my right hand. There was a slight flick of my left thumb, but obvious enough for all to see. I dealt, not the top card, but the second one. For an instant I held it poised and then dropped it, a queen, beside two black queens.

There came a gasp from the wolves around the table. Meung reared suddenly to his feet and like a striking rattlesnake, his hand dipped under his coat. People ducked under tables as Meung's revolver barrel flashed in the lamplight. My eyes abruptly riveted upon the gun. Meung's thumb automatically rubbed the pistol-waist to release a safety catch, but his gun had no catch.

"Take it easy, partner," I said.

"You cheating sideshow! I'll blow your blasted head off!" Meung snarled.

"Forget the gun," I said. Casually, I shoved all my chips, a good eight thousand dollars toward the table center. "I'll stake these against that shooting iron of yours, Meung. I'm giving you a chance. You deal."

The gambler looked at me queerly. "Are you bats?" he growled.

"Nope, just a born gambler. These chips against your gun," I smiled.

Slowly, almost hesitantly, Meung placed his gun upon the table and slid into his chair. His fingers reached for the cards. Every eye in the room was fastened upon our table. We were watched with the intensity of arrested motion.

Meung began the deal, watching me suspiciously as I gathered up my cards.

"Maybe you don't want to finish this hand," I suddenly spoke. "Maybe you won't want to finish when I tell you I didn't come to gamble, but just to make sure you shot cabin steward Higgins aboard the *S.S. Vancouver!*"

Meung bunched his cards under his chin. For an instant he looked past me. Without turning, I knew a girl stood behind me, signaling what I held in my hand to Meung. Then his eyes settled on me. "Smart little guy, eh?" he said sarcastically.

"Not smart," I countered. "Just watchful, like that gal behind me. I knew you killed Higgins because you're left-handed. Naturally you set a gun down on its right side. You did it with Bowen's gun. You just did it now with this pistol."

"Day dreaming, aren't you!" snapped Meung.

"You were in the stateroom next to Bowen's aboard ship so you were able to get into his room. You borrowed his gun for the murder and left your own Webley so he wouldn't think his own was missing," I said evenly. "You're not used to revolvers, Meung. Rather have a Webley Automatic. I noticed your thumb reaching for the safety on this revolver. A Webley would have had a safety catch."

Meung sprang to his feet. His eyes stabbed at me with murderous rage. "You little rat!" he hissed.

His hand darted for the pistol upon the table. It moved as swiftly and surely as a rapier thrust—but not fast enough. The gun wasn't there.

With all my weight, I banged down on my side of the round poker table. Chips scattered in all directions and, as the table slanted, Meung's revolver slid into my hands. The far table edge shot upward clipping the gambler on the point of his jaw. Meung keeled over, cold.

"That, my good man," I said as I gathered up my chips from the floor,

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"is a lesson. Don't play with firearms."

CHAPTER IV

Drums of Lead

LIEUTENANT QUEST paced the floor in my room and slapped a fist impatiently in the palm of one hand. "This whole case is haywire," he said. "First you come back from the Malemute saying Meung killed the steward and Bowen is innocent. Then Hodar says he fine-combed Meung's quarters and found absolutely nothing. Now look at the report I get from the telephone central on Bowen."

"You mean you had Bowen's wire tapped?" asked Hodar.

"Right. And he made a call this morning. Who do you think he called?"

"Probably Jane Lee," I said.

Lieutenant Quest frowned. "He called Meung!"

"What?"

"That's right. And this is what he said, word for word":—Lieutenant Quest read from a slip of paper—" 'You stole my *plans, my life's work. If you don't stop, I'll expose the entire business.*' But that's as much information as I've got," said Quest. "Meung arranged to meet Bowen on the docks behind the Seward Salmon Cannery at four o'clock. That's an hour from now."

"Well, don't arrest them," I cut in. "Let them meet. We'll be there."

"It's pretty odd of Bowen," Hodar murmured. "He's not the type to mix up with crooks."

There was a knock at our door. Opening the door, I was surprised to see Jane Lee accompanied by a heavy set young man who wore rimless glasses. The man was what you call the go-getter type.

"Oscar," Jane began. "This is my fiance, Jack—"

The go-getter stepped into the room briskly. "Let me do the talking, Jane," he said. "I'm Jack Williams, head of the Williams North Star Trading Posts. Got forty of them. All over the peninsula. You're Oscar, eh? Sort of a scientist?"

I gasped a little at the breathless swiftness with which Jack Williams spoke.

"Here," said Williams, taking a packet of greenbacks from his brief case and plunking them on the table. "Ten thousand dollars expense money. I just lost an important trading post on St. Lawrence Island. Can't afford to let it happen again. Got another post at Nunivak Island South of here. Your job is to head an expedition with Karl Bowen. Find out why the St. Lawrence sank. Find out if Nunivak is safe."

"What do you mean—my job?" I answered. I disliked the idea of being railroaded into anything by efficient young business men.

"You've got to do it," snapped Williams. "I'll see that Nome's Chamber of Commerce adds another $50,000 to this. The expedition ship is on its way up from St. Michael. Be ready tomorrow. Okay?"

Jack Williams snapped his brief case shut, took Jane Lee's arm and breezed out of the room almost as quickly as he had come. I noticed a sort of melancholy look in Lieutenant Quest's eyes as he watched the couple depart.

I glanced at my watch. It was quarter of four.

I deposited Williams' packet of money along with my poker winnings in the hotel safe downstairs as we left for the salmon cannery. "Sixty thousand dollars for a bit of detecting isn't bad at all," I murmured. "That is, if the Chamber of Commerce comes

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across."

Hodar looked at me as if I were mad.

"But Oscar, we're already working on a case with Quest," he said.

"Don't kid yourself," I grinned. "Maybe Williams and the Chamber of Commerce don't realize it. But our two cases are connected. The only trouble is, I don't know what the devil we're facing. . . . Or do I?"

MY voice sort of drifted off, frozen in the zero air. Again I was staring at one of those confounded Totem poles. I could have sworn I smelled the thing talking. I stepped toward the grotesque image when Hodar suddenly grabbed me.

"Come on, Oscar, we're late."

"But the totem is talking," I said.

"Nuts!"

It was bitter cold when we arrived at the salmon cannery docks. The sky was overcast and darkening. A steady, saw-toothed wind whipped among the buildings and out across the black waters of the sea.

"We'll stop here on the leeward side of the building until Meung shows up," said Lieutenant Quest as he loosened the gun in his holster.

Suddenly something hit me an awful wallop, a short left jab to the nose. I staggered back against Hodar, clutching at his coat tails for support. "Great Martian Gods!" I cried, meanwhile holding my sensitive nose.

Both Hodar and Quest stared at me curiously, then Hodar began laughing. "I forgot about that, Oscar. The salmon smell. It must have hit a nose like yours a terrific blow, eh?"

The fish odor from the cannery! That was a new and horrible experience for me. And let me tell you, if Earthmen ever want to conquer Mars, the odor of a salmon cannery and not guns will do it.

"It's absolutely barbaric," I told Hodar. It was then that I got one of my more commercial ideas. My nose and brain took but a moment to analyze the components of *odor piscium,* better known as fish smell. I tore a leaf from my notebook and scribbled out a quick, workable formula for taking the smell out of canned fish. I hurried around to the main entrance of the building to slip the memo under their door.

But that was as far as I got. I saw the company's name on the door—SEWARD SALMON COMPANY, SUBSIDIARY OF SEWARD IMPORT COMPANY.

Lieutenant Quest came around and saw me goggling at the nameplate. "It's after four," he growled. "Meung and Bowen haven't shown hide nor hair."

"Is nitric acid used for canning?" I asked abruptly.

Quest stared at me strangely.

"I think this cannery needs a going over," I added. "Hodar, pull your magic out and open this door."

Hodar, who is, if anything, better than Houdini, sort of opened Lieutenant Quest's eyes when he opened the sturdy double bolt door in less than eleven seconds. "Good Lord," murmured the Lieutenant, "and here I used a jimmy to break into Captain Follett's cabin when I searched it aboard ship."

I found a light switch and flooded the principal room of the cannery. Most of the equipment had been oiled and covered. This was the off season. As we moved toward the back of the building I saw something that struck me oddly. . . .

Piled in one corner were dozens of the huge metal drums which I had seen in the hold of the *S.S. Vancouver!* Beyond them were some vats. I dipped my finger in one, smelling and tasting the liquid. It was a sweet, sirupy,

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colorless stuff. The identifying formula $C_3H_5(OH)_3$—saponified natural fats—leaped to my mind instantly.

Near these vats were a number of huge cylindrical drums made of lead and partially encased by wood. They looked like converters of some sort. I began to investigate when Hodar, who had drifted off to a small side office, shouted at the top of his lungs. "OSCAR!"

I scurried around the converters like a rabbit with buckshot an inch behind him. Hodar was kneeling over a man's body.

It was Karl Bowen—dead! A knife in his neck.

LIEUTENANT QUEST took one look at Bowen's cold corpse. His lips tightened grimly as he whirled about and hurried from the cannery. "I'm getting Meung!" he said.

Instead of following the lean Canadian, I stooped and went through the dead explorer's pockets. He hadn't been searched. His killer had probably been in too much of a hurry to get away. In his passport I found a series of newspaper clippings taken from British, Canadian, German, Norwegian and Swedish newspapers.

Reading several of them with Hodar's help, I saw that they had one thing in common, an amazing factor. The articles gave news of an Arctic Development Corporation which had petitioned the various world governments holding claims in the North for trading franchise rights.

"Do you see what I see?" I asked Hodar. "Not one of the petitions asked for trading franchises in Alaska, Northern Canada or Greenland. *The Arctic Development Corporation asks for trading and developing rights in unexplored territory, absolutely frozen territory where people can't live. They want the whole of the unexplored Arctic!"*

Hodar stared at me for a second. "That's fantastic," he said. "No company is mad enough to try developing the polar regions. It can't be done."

I snapped my fingers suddenly. "Hodar," I said. "Bowen was an Arctic explorer. He must have found something because there's a connection. Remember the Lisbon meeting of world diplomats. The Arctic question was brought up there. But what the hell is it? There's a natural connection between that meeting, Meung and the murder of Bowen."

"But what's behind it all?"

"I don't know, Hodar. But I think it's a big case, bigger than we've ever tackled and I've a feeling the United States will be dragged into it."

"Why the U.S.?"

"Because, haven't you noticed, every time I get in on a case it seems to be my destiny to protect American interests?" I think Hodar expected me to whistle a bar from Yankee Doodle at this point. Instead, I started for the door. "We're going to Meung's place to get Quest," I said. "I don't think we'll find Meung by himself."

LIEUTENANT QUEST was swearing a blue streak and hurriedly searching Meung's apartment over the Malemute Bar when we arrived.

"He's gone," snapped Quest.

"You needn't search the place," I replied. "He probably took whatever needed taking. Wasn't much. Hodar searched here before."

It was then I noticed that Quest wasn't looking at me. He was staring past me. I whirled almost on a dime and stood face to face with the rather buxom cafe girl who had been part of Meung's poker team.

"Hello, little guy," she smiled at me.

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As she stepped into the room, eying Quest and Hodar with frank appraising glances, I got a whiff of her perfume. Boy, did it say things.

"Who are you?" Quest demanded.

The girl shrugged her shoulders. "You can call me, Lou, big boy." She smiled again. "I suppose you're looking for Meung, that rat?"

"What do you know about him?" Quest shot at her.

"I know he's gone, ain't he? He run out on me, the rat. Try to give me the double cross for another skirt, will he? Maybe you don't know he just killed this Bowen guy. You want to know where he went, huh? Well I'll spill it."

"Go ahead," snapped Quest.

"So Meung ran out on me, with a doll," said the woman named Lou. An angry, jealous tone entered her voice. "Well, he's headed Eastward with a dog team and a dozen rifles. He went off with that doll, Jane Lee."

"Jane Lee—" Quest gasped.

"Yeah, that's her," replied the cafe girl. "Maybe she can tell you why this explorer guy was rubbed out—if you can catch her!"

CHAPTER V

The Totems Talk

DRIVING eastward toward Norton the sea cuts in to the right of the Seward Peninsula. It's a long, desolate expanse of snow covered tundra, the barren white slopes marred only by the fringe of thundering ice floes along the Norton Sound shore.

The vague, sickly light of a new and shorter day was just breaking. It found us, Lieutenant Quest and me, miles from Nome in the midst of the vast and bleak snow country. Behind us was the winding trail slashed in the snow by our sledge and team of yapping huskies. Ahead, there was nothing but unrelieved whiteness.

"We're still seventy miles from Norton and we've lost their trail. They may have headed for there then changed their direction," said Lieutenant Quest.

"I'm about dead," I muttered.

I was, actually. A great deal had happened since the previous evening when we had discovered Bowen murdered and that Jane Lee had run off with Meung. We had decided to give chase. Quest and I were to take a dog team while Hodar remained in Nome to watch things.

Before starting I had made a little fur cap for my tulip nose because it was so sensitive to the cold. Little did I realize at the time that this would cause us some delay and trouble. Then, like mad *cheechakos* * *we mushed out of* Nome into the teeth of a frigid north wind.

Throughout the long night, as we pushed ahead, driving the dogs like madmen, we passed an endless parade of Totem poles. They were planted all over the peninsula. There were so many they even got on Quest's nerves. Toward morning something else happened and it almost finished me. . . . The fur cap on my nose!

A band of migratory Eskimos, hunting in the night along the Norton Sound shore, spotted me. Unlike Quest, I didn't wear a parka and boots. My extremely heavy Martian skin which is proof against bullets is also proof against cold, but on my nose I had the little fur cap. The Eskimos took me for a strange sort of animal.

For twenty minutes I scurried wildly up and down ice floes and across the tundra, the Eskimos hot on my heels with harpoons. Finally Quest succeeded in cutting them off, dumping me exhausted into the sledge and whipping

* Eskimo for greenhorn.

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the dogs ahead so mercilessly that we out-distanced them. That was how we lost Meung's trail.

But dead as I felt, I became suddenly alert. I sensed a reaction in our lead husky as the sledge skimmed down a slough slope. Then I noticed the cave.

Our dogs immediately stopped, their tails and heads lowered like wolves, their formidable hackles rising stiffly, low menacing snarls rising in their throats.

"Something there," Quest observed quickly.

He drew his revolver and moved forward into the shadows of the cave. I noticed as we crept forward that there were no sledge marks. Naturally the driving wind had swept fresh snow over any such traces.

"Place is empty," I heard Quest say.

I PUSHED in beside him. The low cave was indeed empty but there were signs of life for a moss fire still smoldered and the smell of cooked food clung to the air.

"Maybe a party of Eskimos," said Quest. "Smells like a pup seal was roasted."

The Lieutenant squatted upon the floor, his flashlight brushing here and there. It was clear that the party which had camped here was quite large, not just a girl and a man. There were bones spread over quite an area—seal bones.

Quest picked up one of the bones, then another. He sucked in his breath. "Whoever camped here weren't native Eskimos," he said. "They were either half-breeds or whites."

I started to take my nose cap off to do a little investigating myself when Quest grinned at me.

"Don't bother about smells," he said. "These bones are proof enough. Native Eskimos break open the seal bones and eat the marrow. White men can't stand the taste—too strong."

"So. We're on the trail. Let's go."

"Take it easy," Quest warned. "If Meung and Jane Lee were here, they've picked up some company. Armed company!"

When we stood out in the snows again and headed our dog team on toward Norton, we moved more warily. The day had grown intensely white. We mushed from slough to slough, keeping in hollows as much as possible to avoid being seen first if Meung should be ahead.

It was when we drove into one such hollow that I yelled to Quest to stop the dogs. Directly in front stood another of those grotesque Totems. It was huge—a crudely carved series of leering images, fifty feet high and some three feet in diameter. This time I was positive. The thing was fairly shouting at me. To Quest's utter amazement I began circling around the Totem, sniffing up and down like a dog getting friendly with a tree.

"Great Martian Gods!" I finally shouted in a dither of excitement. "Those Totems were all talking to me. I was dense. I didn't get it. They were talking with odors."

"Are you crazy?" Quest cut in.

"Crazy!" I cried. "I was crazy not to have sensed this before. *This Totem pole is hollow! It's filled with trinitroglycerin!* Enough to blow the land away from here over a twenty mile area."

"What?"

"That's right. And all those other poles we saw are filled with trinitroglycerin. There's enough to blow up the entire Seward Peninsula. My nose smelled the nitro odor and I thought the things were talking to me."

"That's too fantastic," Quest frowned. He took an axe from the

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sledge and started to swing on the pole. "We'll see," he said.

"HEY! Stop!" I screamed. "This stuff is touchy. It might go off at the slightest shock."

"But we've got to know."

"Listen, Quest. Take my word for it. My tulip nose never fails. I'm just sorry I wasn't on the alert. I should have realized about these Totems sooner. Remember our ship? It carried drums of nitric and sulphuric acids. Remember the cannery? We saw the same acids there, and vats of a sirupy liquid, glycerin. . . .

"Well, I see it all now. Trinitroglycerin is too dangerous an explosive to ship to Alaska overseas. Also, whoever is planting this stuff didn't want it known that Alaska was being turned into a powder keg. They shipped the chemicals separately. At the cannery we visited, and maybe at others, they mixed the acids then put the stuff in the convertor or nitrator."

"The what? Where?" asked Quest still amazed.

"The nitrator," I said impatiently. "Those big lead drums incased in wood. We saw them in the cannery. The acids work on the glycerin. All they needed was a compressor and a cooling system."

"But damn it! What's the meaning of it?" snapped Quest.

I caught my breath. I was no longer looking at the Lieutenant. Coming over the snowy ridge above us, I saw two sledges and a dozen men racing toward us.

"Meung—" I shouted.

Almost immediately, a rifle shot zinged past us and threw up a white powder of snow as it hit near the Totem pole.

"Look out! Get away from here. Got to draw their fire," I commanded frantically as I grabbed the Lieutenant and we ran away from the Totem. If one bullet hit that pole—well, let's not think about it!

Quest snatched a rifle from the sledge and we dropped in the snow some fifty yards from the Totem. Bullets sang by our ears in a deadly melody. Quest pumped away with the rifle and I with his revolver. Two . . . three men dropped. Still Meung's party came on.

Their fire was deadly and heavy. There was only one thing we could do for the odds were five to one against us. I stood up and faced the attack. Quest knelt behind me, sheltered by my bullet proof skin. . . . And did the bullets ricochet off me!

"Look," yelled Quest, "they're breaking up."

Meung's men were spreading out. Some were running. Then I saw through their strategy. "Breaking up, yeah. But they're circling us. We're trapped!" I muttered.

The attackers slowly closed in, crawling over the snow, kneeling to fire. I could make out the faces of the half-breeds and Meung. In the sledge, I saw Jane Lee.

Suddenly I heard a rifle report on our right. Lieutenant Quest gasped and stiffened, falling on his side. He grabbed his side with tensed fingers.

"Got it in the ribs," he said grimly. "Bleeding. Guess we're done for. Too much odds."

CHAPTER VI

Secret of the Bering Sea

"HERE. Take this and keep firing!" I said as I shoved the pistol into his hand. "I've got my own way of fixing the odds."

I pulled a little copper tube from my

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pocket. An object which I've carried with me and guarded zealously since the night I first appeared upon Earth. It's a Martian gadget. You'll never see one like it on Earth.

"They'll be on us in a minute, Oscar," Quest gritted. "You'd better run while you've got a chance to break through. I'll cover you. Warn them in Nome about the Totems!"

I had my gadget ready. It was a gun. I inserted three dull silver pellets into it then fired at points equidistant between Meung's advancing breeds and ourselves. The results were amazing. Of course I knew what I was doing, but the results were still amazing by any earthly standards.

Quest took one dazed look and almost fainted. We were surrounded by a screen of vari-colored, shimmering smoke which spread from the snow where my pellets had struck. Through the encircling smoke screen Meung's men could be seen—not nine cut throat half-breeds, but more than ninety of them.

"He's got an army now," Quest gasped. "We haven't got a bloody chance."

"Don't let it get you down," I grinned. "Little trick of mine. Look carefully through the smoke. You'll notice there are ten Meungs, not one. The smoke particles, like particles of moisture in a rainbow, refract images and multiply them by ten. Right now those half-breeds think they're seeing twenty of us. Ten Oscars and ten Quests. Look!"

My words were already a proven fact. The attacking breeds, not knowing the secret of my smoke screen, had broken rank. Soon they were retreating in frantic confusion over the snowy slope. Meung's single voice could be heard screaming at them, but vainly. His ten refracted figures waved twenty angry arms.

Just as Quest and I ran through the hovering image-screen toward his two sledges, we saw the Gambler leap toward the one in which Jane Lee struggled. He had gone mad! He jerked out his revolver and held it against the girl's head.

In the same instant there was a thundering roar in my ears. An angry flash of flame burst past my head. I saw Meung pitch forward over the sledge while clawing at his chest. At my side, Lieutenant Quest, lowered his gun.

"He'll never move again," Quest muttered. "He's dead, unless he just didn't have any heart to shoot out!"

As we reached the sledge and dragged the dead man's body aside, we found Jane Lee crying. Then I noticed that she was bound and gagged.

JANE told her story a little later. It was while we were in the cave where the seal bones had been discovered. We had returned there to build a fire and apply a little first aid to Lieutenant Quests's side where a bullet had nicked his ribs.

In the firelight she gave us a warm look, as if to say we were both saints.

"Please, Oscar," she murmured. "I'm as puzzled as you are. It's all so horrible. I don't know why Meung kidnapped me. All I know is that I received a message saying Jack Williams was hurt and that I should come to the Nome airport. When I arrived, I was thrown into the sledge and kidnapped. Does Jack know what happened?"

I nodded thoughtfully. "Yes. Hodar was instructed to contact him. Williams has probably rounded up the whole Chamber of Commerce who by now ought to be out looking for you."

Jane Lee reddened a little. "I guess

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I'm glad you rescued me instead of Jack," she murmured, glancing at Lieutenant Quest.

"So?" I asked.

"Well . . . I'm not going to marry Jack," Jane answered hesitantly. He's . . . well, we just don't get along together. He's too much of a business man. He's not adventurous." Again Jane glanced at Quest.

I shrugged. This was no business of mine. If I were Jack Williams, I'd bust her on the nose. A girl who doesn't appreciate a man who can plunk down ten thousand dollars to finance a small expedition ought to have something done to her. But Earthwomen are like that, unpredictable.

"Where was Meung heading for?" I asked.

"For Norton, then Ruby," Jane answered.

I picked up a heavy envelope which we had found in one of Meung's sledges. I remembered having seen a map in it when I had picked it up after rescuing Jane. "Why Norton Bay; or why Ruby?" I murmured. "Have a look at the map."

Spreading the contents of the envelope on the cavern floor I noticed something peculiar. In addition to the map, there was a chart that showed only the Seward Peninsula and a sheaf of clipped papers in a handwriting which I immediately recognized—Karl Bowen's.

I paged through the papers excitedly. I sensed danger. My reaction was anything but far fetched. The stuff was almost incredible.

"Listen, Quest! Here's the answer to everything," I gasped. "These are the result of Bowen's years in the Arctic. Just listen to this! *He's worked out a theory that if the Bering Straits are widened, blasted open, by eliminating the Seward Peninsula and St. Lawrence Island the Japanese Warm Currents would flow into the Arctic Sea!*

"Do you understand what that means? Listen to this! I'll read right from Bowen's notes:"

I COULD scarcely hold the page up to read it, I was so excited.

*"'If the Japanese Current were to flow into the Polar seas instead of deflecting toward California, the polar icecap would melt, revealing new land masses. The Arctic would become an Eden capable of supporting millions of people.'"**

Quest snapped up some of the notes. His eyes blinked dazedly. "M-M-My God!" he stuttered. "Everything's here. The figures on how far the warm current would penetrate; on how wide the Straits should be blasted. There's even an estimate on the tonnage of trinitroglycerin needed for the job."

I looked at Bowen's map of the Seward Peninsula. There were little red marks indicating where such explosive charges would have to be set off to totally destroy the peninsula. Then I noticed that little, hastily sketched totem poles had been added to the map in a hand that was obviously not Bowen's.

Bowen's theory of blasting the narrow 35 mile Bering Straits bottle neck is no idle dream. Such a continental WPA project requiring the removal of Nome, the upheaval of the Seward Peninsula and St. Lawrence Island to allow the Japanese Current into the Polar area was first envisioned by the late Charles P. Steinmetz, electrical and mathematical wizard of the General Electric Company.

Steinmetz left complete plans and estimates on how the job should be done. For money it would cost approximately what it costs to run the present war for one year. The amazing theory for world face-lifting would, according to scientists, create an ice-free Northwest Passage, double the habitable area of the world, modify the climatic conditions of the whole of North America, causing a milder, more productive climate. The Arctic region would have a climate similar to that of Northern California and Washington.—Ed.

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"Those Totems!" I said, leaping to my feet as though an electric charge had jolted through me. "The trinitroglycerin! It's already planted. They're going to blow up the Peninsula—right out from under us. We've got to stop them."

"Stop who?" asked Jane.

"We killed Meung," Quest interrupted. "He was behind it. That much is clear."

I shot an ironic glance at the Lieutenant. "There's still someone behind Meung. He was just a cog in the business. We've still got to face the chief of the Arctic Development Corporation. That's the outfit behind this. Remember the trading concessions they petitioned for. Why, they were out to cut the throat of every government holding legitimate claims in the Arctic Circle."

"But who is it?" Quest looked mystified.

"I've got a general idea," I said. "But that's got to wait. There are Totems filled with explosives all over this frozen land and someone capable of setting them off. We've got to stop it. But how? The Totems aren't wired. In fact, how were they going to be set off in the first place?"

I paced the floor and put my mind to work. I cut every unnecessary thought and sensation from my being for a full five minutes. I didn't even notice how Jane Lee's hand crept into Quest's sturdy palm until I suddenly whirled upon her.

"Has Jack Williams got a plane?" I asked.

Jane gave a little start and blushed. "Yes, Jack's got three planes. He uses them for his trading business."

"Good," I said. "We're going to clip the Arctic Development Corporation's wings. I just hope those planes are in Nome. Come on. Mush!"

THE long trek back to Nome was a harrowing experience for all three of us. We whipped the last ounce of energy out of the dog teams as we raced over the frozen tundras. It was a race against nerves and time. At any moment the Peninsula was due to surge up beneath us in the most cataclysmic upheaval imaginable.

As we drove past the innumerable explosive filled Totem poles that dotted the barren land, we experienced the most damning feeling of desperate helplessness. We were surrounded by death and we could do no more than drive our dog teams at a more maddening pace.

With nerves almost shot and muscles crying out in protest against the inhuman task put to them, we finally staggered into Nome's bleak airport. Another dawn was already breaking as the panting, bleary-eyed dogs pulled up at the squat administration building.

Quest, barely able to stand himself, carried Jane into the building where a red-bellied stove gave off an almost infernal heat.

I grabbed a sleepy eyed field attendant and got him to tell me where Jack Williams' planes were. Luck was with me again. The three planes had been taken from their hangars and were moored on the field, their motors warming up. Williams had telephoned the airport, but fifteen minutes past, ordering the planes out to take part in the search for Jane Lee.

"Water," I said. "I want buckets of water quick."

The attendant looked at me queerly. He pointed at a couple of buckets against the wall.

What I did then will be talked about for the next ten years in Nome. Heedless of the intense sub-zero cold, I rushed bucket after bucket of water out to Williams' planes. The water, when it splashed against my legs, froze al-

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most instantly. Hastily, I dumped each bucket in the snow when I reached the planes. Crazy! Well, maybe I was. But I went back and repeated the business all over again.

Finished with that fantastic job, I ran into the administration building office where Quest and Jane had been watching me through the window.

"What the hell are you doing? Water won't stop trinitroglycerin. It'll freeze before we take off," said Quest.

"Don't worry," I said. "Oscar has it all in control." I picked up a phone from the desk and called the United States Marshal's office in town.

The connection came through in a moment.

"Hello, Marshal, this is Oscar. Yeah, Oscar the Martian Detective." I hugged the phone to my ear. "Yeah, Marshal, just got back. Got all the dope on the St. Lawrence mystery. Now listen. Something worse is going to happen if we don't work fast. The Seward Peninsula and Nome may be blown up . . ."

I heard a few gurgling sounds at the other end of the line.

"Listen Marshal," I barked into the phone, "Round up every man in Nome who owns a pair of snowshoes and a dog team. Get all the slack lime you can and start pouring it on the Totem poles in Nome. They're filled with nitroglycerin. Slack lime kills it. I'll be over in a minute with a map showing you where the rest of the stuff is buried."

I BARELY hung the ear piece on the hook when I felt myself collapse in a chair. The pace was too hot.

"The Marshal can't locate all those nitro deposits in three days," said Quest. "We'll be blown up before that."

"Stop worrying," I answered peevishly. "I know who's behind this business and we'll stop him."

A door slammed behind me; then a voice spoke with the chilling sharpness of a dagger stabbing into my back, saying, "So you know all about it? Well, try stopping me now!"

In the chair at my side, I saw Jane Lee look up, her eyes framed with bewilderment that quickly changed to horror. "Jack—," she screamed.

Jack Williams stood at the office door, staring at us coldly. Behind him were three very tough looking men in furs. They wore pilot's goggles pushed up upon their foreheads. One of them carried a sub-machine gun. The ugly black barrel was leveled upon me.

I grinned at Williams. "Sort of expecting you," I said. "Not quite this soon though."

"Shut up!" snapped Williams. He swerved his glance toward Jane. "Too bad you learned about this so soon," he said icily. "Sorry. I can't trust women who know too much. You're going to take it along with your detective friends."

Lieutenant Quest took a step forward, his eyes burning angrily at Williams.

"Leave her out of this, Williams," he growled. "And put that gun down. I'll—."

"Jim!" It was Jane Lee. Her eyes held a terrified and frantic appeal as she threw herself in front of Lieutenant Quest.

"Cut the hysterics!" Williams spoke evenly, as he and his men backed through the door. "You'll have time for them when we drop a few bombs from our plane."

The door slammed shut. In the same instant Quest threw his weight against it but he was too late. The key had turned in the lock.

"Damn it, Oscar," he shouted.

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"They're going to bomb the nitro deposits. My God, they can set off the whole peninsula in a few hours with three planes!"

CHAPTER VII

Citizen Oscar

JANE LEE stood by the window. Her lips moved in silent terror and her eyes, frozen with horror, were fixed upon the flying field. The landing lights had been switched on, flooding the flat ground with a brilliant whiteness.

Out on the field Williams and his three flying gunmen ran toward their planes. They stopped for a moment to intercept the astonished field attendant, jab a gun into his ribs and hurry him toward the planes.

"Look out!" hissed Lieutenant Quest as he pushed Jane away from the window.

He raised the butt end of a rifle, smashing the glass in the windows. Another blow splintered the wooden frames. Quest heaved himself over the sill, heedless of the saw-toothed fragments of glass. "Come Oscar," he yelled. Suddenly he stopped, staring at me queerly.

Of course, I don't blame him. We were in a tough spot. Williams and his men had held us up just long enough so they could get to their planes. In those planes there were bombs. That was how they planned to set off the nitro filled Totem poles. The slightest jar from a bomb would touch off entire strings of such poles for one explosion would act as a percussion cap for another.

"Oscar—," Quest practically roared.

I looked back at him and grinned as dapperly as I could. I was sitting in a swivel chair, my feet up on the desk, as quiet as you please.

"They've reached the planes," Jane cried. "It's too late now."

Out across the field the smooth roar of engines could be heard. That was just what I had been waiting for. I swiveled my chair so as to face Quest.

"Okay, *Teniente,*" I snapped. "Get out there in the field and cover the cabin doors of the planes. Shoot the first man that steps out!"

Quest sort of sucked his breath in, as though he thought I were completely mad.

I reached across the desk and grabbed up the phone. "United States Marshal's office!" I barked into the mouthpiece. I listened a moment, then the connection was made. "Hello, Marshal," I said. "Oscar, again. Listen, there are four crazy men out here at the airport. They're trying to take off in planes."

"What?" came the Marshal's voice.

"That's right," I said. "They're trying to take off in planes and the plane skis are frozen solid to the ground."

"Frozen?" asked the Marshal.

"Sure," I grinned. "Frozen. You know how it is. You dump buckets of water. The stuff freezes. Yeah. Send a posse out immediately."

THE Nome Chamber of Commerce did a very unique thing the evening after we captured Jack Williams. The business men took over the Malemute Bar and threw a banquet for me. The Malemute was the biggest place in town and most of the town was there.

During the eating and drinking I did my best to explain to newspaper reporters what a swell job the U.S. Marshal and his men had done in capturing Williams after Lieutenant Quest had cornered them in the three planes.

We had gotten a full confession from Williams. We had the names of all his

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confederates, and he had plenty. Then the Marshal and his men worked double-time pulling down the deadly Totem poles, neutralizing their explosive charges with slacklime.

"How come none of the poles exploded while they were up?" asked one of the reporters. "Trinitroglycerin is sensitive stuff. A feather can explode it, I hear."

"That," I smiled, "was a long chance I banked on when Quest and I first discovered the stuff. Nitro has a low freezing point but the Alaska weather is lower. When frozen, nitro is less sensitive stuff.

One of the reporters glanced at Jane.

"But why did this Meung fellow kidnap her?" the reporter asked.

"Wouldn't you?" I grinned.

"Come on, Oscar, the lowdown," another reporter cut in.

I smiled again. I tried looking across the table toward the Marshal but with my four feet five inches I couldn't see over the stack of greenbacks—$50,000 worth—which the Chamber of Commerce had presented to Hodar, Quest and me.

"Okay," I told the reporters. "The Marshal's busy tracking some sand in his salad so here's the dope. There's a reason for Jane having been kidnapped. A very important point. But I'll start at the beginning. . . .

"THIS whole business of blasting a three hundred mile wide channel in the Bering Straits is a swell idea, but, only if responsible governments handle the job. Our Arctic Development Company didn't work this way though. They were a bunch of shrewd and not very patriotic financiers. They figured that while the world was at war it was the time to horn in and do their dirt. They stole Bowen's plans which he intended turning over to the United States Government. . . ."

"Yeah, what's happening to them?" a reporter cut in.

"A brief of the case has been sent to the various governments so that they can deal with those fifth columnists."

"And Williams was the head of it?"

I nodded. "Yes. He didn't put up much money, but he was the brains behind it. It was his idea to ship the acids and glycerin into Alaska separately to avoid arousing suspicion. Meung was just his henchman and go-between. When Meung got in trouble after killing the cabin steward aboard ship, then Bowen, he had to get out of Nome. . . .

"But he wasn't taking any chances letting Williams double cross him. So he stole Bowen's plans from Williams and kidnapped Jane Lee. *The kidnapping convinced me Williams was in on the plot!* Why else did Meung want a girl he hardly knew? It was to have something over Williams' head so the latter wouldn't double cross. The only trouble was, he didn't know Williams and the girl were on the verge of breaking up."

Someone tugged on my arm. It was the roly-poly president of the Chamber of Commerce. "Here, Oscar old pal. A telegram," he said.

"Thanks Bodkins," I murmured as I tore the envelope open. Some of the reporters crowded around, reading over my shoulder as I opened the letter.

DEAR OSCAR:

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR LATEST SUCCESS. WE HEREBY CONFER FULL AND IMMEDIATE CITIZENSHIP UPON YOU. BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION HAS ESTABLISHED A QUOTA OF IMMIGRATION INTO THE UNITED STATES FOR ONE MARTIAN.
(Signed) THE PRESIDENT OF THE U.S.A.
THE CONGRESS
THE CABINET

"Hodar!" I shouted, leaping from my chair. "Now I can vote!"

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HOK VISITS THE LAND OF LEGENDS

ONLY Hok could have done it—only Hok the Mighty, strongest and wisest and bravest of the Flint Folk whose chief he was. For Gragru the mammoth was in those days the noblest of all beasts hunted by man—to bring one down was an enterprise for the combined hunter-strength of a tribe. Save for Hok, no man would even think of killing Gragru single-handed.

But Hok had so thought. And for Hok, to think was to do. When winter's heaviest snow had choked the meadows and woods that Hok's people had won by battle from the half-beastly Gnorrls,* he put his plan into action.

Not that food was scarce. A late flight of geese had dropped floundering on the frozen river before the village of mud huts, and Hok's sturdy young son Ptao had led the other children to seize them. Hok's brother Zhik had traced a herd of elk to their stamped-out clearing in a willow thicket, and was planning a raid thither. But Hok's big blond head teemed with great thoughts, his blue eyes seemed to gaze on far distances of the spirit. Already he thought of such game as trivial.

On a cloudy gray day, not too cold, he spoke from his cave-door in the bluff above the huts. "I go on a lone hunt," he told the tribe. "It will be several days, perhaps, before I return. In my absence, Zhik is your chief." Then he gave his handsome wife Oloana a rib-buckling hug, and told young Ptao to grow in his absence. He departed along the river trail, heading south for mammoth country.

His big, tall body was dressed in fur from throat to toe. His long shanks wore tight-wound wolfskin leggings, fur inside. His moccasins, of twofold bison leather, had tops reaching almost to his knees, and were plentifully tallowed against wet. His body was wrapped in the pelt of a cave-lion, arms fitting inside the neatly skinned fore-legs, mane muffling his neck and chest. Fox-fur gloves protected his hands. All openings and laps were drawn snug by leather laces. Only his great head, with golden clouds of hair and beard, was defiantly bare to winter.

Leaving the village, Hok paused to strap his feet into rough snowshoes.* The Flint Folk had developed such things by watching how nature made broad the feet of hare, ptarmigan and lynx to glide on top of the snow. Hok's weapons were a big bow of yew, a quiver of arrows, a big keen axe of blue flint. At his side hung a sizeable deerskin pouch, full of hunter's gear and provisions.

Away he tramped, his blue eyes scanning the horizon. Far off was a black bison, snow-swamped, with wolves closing in. Nearer, gaunt

* See "Battle in the Dawn", "Hok Draws the Bow", etc. AMAZING STORIES, January, '39, and May, '40.—Ed.

* Professor Katherine E. Dopp and others have pointed out the absolute necessity for the invention of snowshoes by Stone Age hunters of Hok's time.—Ed.

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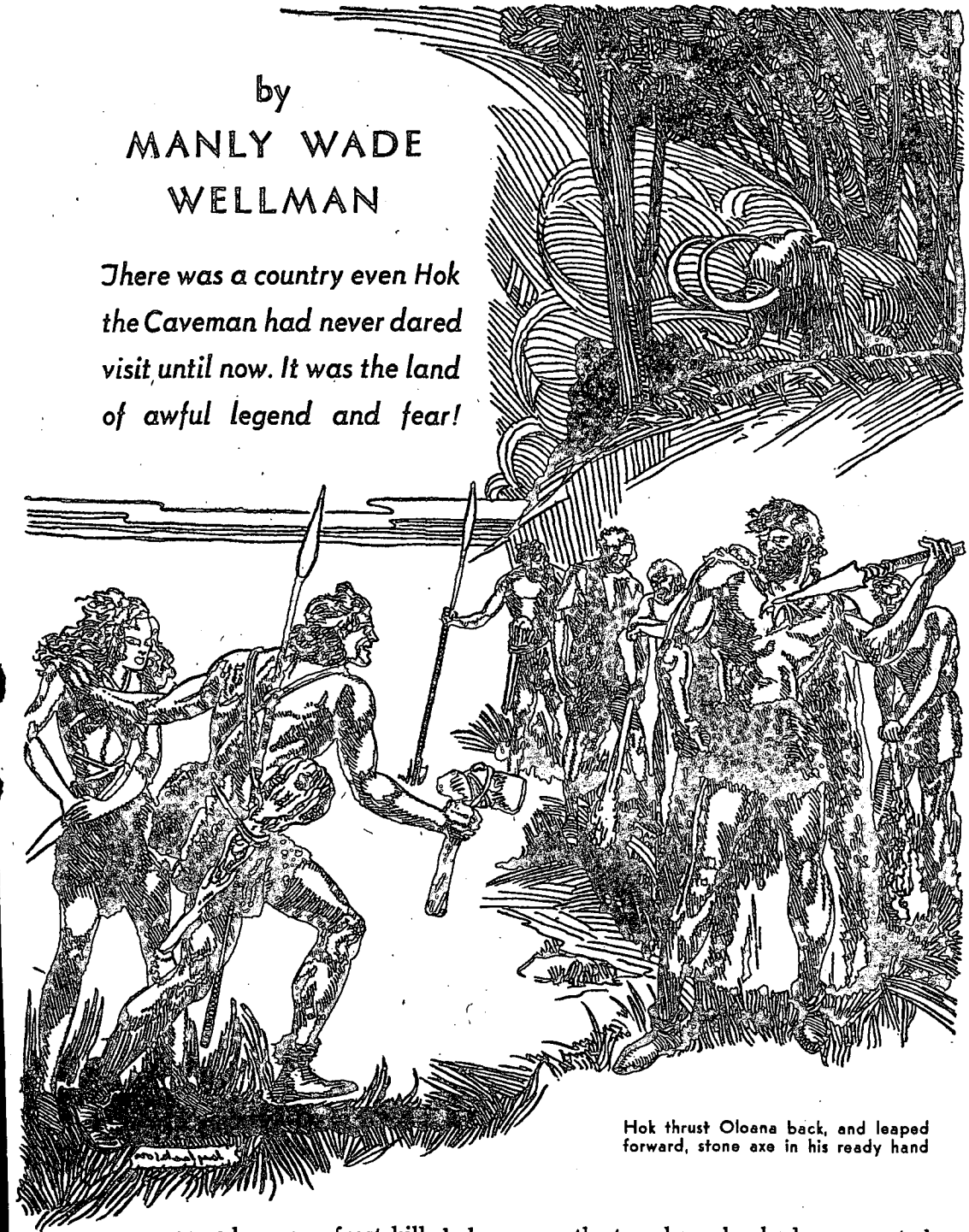
by
MANLY WADE
WELLMAN

There was a country even Hok the Caveman had never dared visit until now. It was the land of awful legend and fear!



Hok thrust Oloana back, and leaped forward, stone axe in his ready hand

ravens sawed over a frost-killed deer. Winter was the hungry season—eat or be eaten was its byword. Hok's people would eat plentifully of Gragru's carcass. . . . Hok journeyed west and south, to where he had once noted a grove of pine and juniper.

It was all of a morning and part of the afternoon before Hok reached the grove. He smiled over nearby mam-

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moth tracks, large enough for him to curl up in. The prey had been there. It would return. He began preparations.

He set up headquarters in the center of the grove, scooping out a den in the snow and laying branches above it for roof. His bow and arrows he hung to a big pine trunk, away from damp. Then, axe in hand, he sought out a springy red cedar, felled it and trimmed away the branches. Dragging it to his camp, Hok laboriously hewed and whittled it into a great bow-stave, twice as long as himself and thicker at the midpoint than his brawny calf, with the two ends properly tapered.

BENDING the bow was a task for even Hok. From his bag he took a great coil of rawhide rope, several strands thick. With a length of this he lashed the bow horizontally to the big pine. To each end he fastened a second line, making this fast to a tree behind. After that, he toiled to bend one arm, then the other, using all his braced strength and weight and shortening each lashing. The stout cedar bent little by little into a considerable curve.

Next Hok affixed his bowstring of rawhide, first soaking it in slush. When it was as tight as he could make it, he lighted a row of fires near it. As the string dried and shrank in the heat, the bow bent still more.

Meanwhile, Hok was cutting an arrow to fit that bow, a pine sapling thrice the length of his leg. From his pouch he produced a flint point longer than his foot, flaked to a narrow, sharp apex. This he lashed into the split tip, and with his axe chopped a notch in the opposite butt. The finished arrow he laid across his big bow.

"My weapon is ready to draw for killing," he said with satisfaction, and put himself to new toil. A lashing of rope held the arrow notched on the string, and Hok carried the end of this new lashing backward, around a stump directly to the rear. With braced feet, swelling muscles, panting chest, he heaved and slaved and outdid himself until the bow was drawn to the fullest and his pull-rope hitched firmly to the anchorage. He stepped back and proudly surveyed the finished work. "Good!" he approved himself.

He had made and drawn a bow for such a giant as his old mother had spoken of, long ago in his childhood. The big pine to which the bow was bound stood for the archer's rigid gripping hand. The back-stretched rope from the arrow's notch was the drawing hand. All that was needed would be a target in front of it.

And Hok arranged for that.

He cut young, green juniper boughs and made to heaps, three strides apart, so that the arrow pointed midway between them. Then he hacked away branches and bushes that might interfere with the shaft's flight. It was evening by now. He built up his fire behind the drawn bow, toasted a bit of meat from his pouch, and finally slept.

At dawn he woke. Snow was falling. Hok rose and gazed along the little lane in front of the arrow.

There came the prey he hoped for.

Gragru the mammoth, tremendous beyond imagination, marched with heavy dignity to the enticing breakfast Hok had set him. A hillock of red-black hair, more than twice Hok's height at the shoulder;* he sprouted great spiral tusks of creamy ivory, each a weight for several men. His head, a hairy boulder, had a high cranium and

* This was a specimen of the Imperial Mammoth, which stood some 14 feet high. Partial remains of such a giant can be seen at the National Museum of Natural History in New York City.—Ed.

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small, wise eyes. His long, clever trunk sniffed at one stack of juniper, and began to convey it to his mouth.*

Hok drew his keen dagger of reindeer horn. The mammoth gobbled on, finished the first stack, then swung across to the second.

Hok squinted a last time along the arrow. It aimed at the exact point he had hoped—the hair-thatched flank of the beast. Hok set his knife to the draw-rope—sliced the strands—

Honng! With a whoop of freed strength, the bow hurled its shaft. A heavy thud rang back, and Gragru trumpeted in startled pain.

"You are my meat!" yelled Hok.

Gragru wheeled and charged the voice. Hok caught his bow and arrows from their hanging place, gathered the snowshoes under his arm, and danced nimbly aside. "I shot you!" he cried again. "I, Hok!"

Blundering through the brush, Gragru looked right and left for his enemy; but Hok had sagely trotted around behind him. A savage exploration of the thicket, to no avail—then Gragru sought the open again. His blood streamed from wounds on either side where the pine-shaft transfixed him, but he still stood steady on his great tree-stump feet.

Hok came to the fringe of the junipers. "You shall not escape!" he yelled at the mammoth. "Hok will eat you!"

THIS time Gragru did not charge. He knew that death had smitten through hair and hide and bone, to the center of his lungs. No time left for combat or revenge—time only for one thing, the thing that every mammoth must do in his last hour. . . .

He turned and struggled away southward through the snow.

Hok watched. He remembered the stories of his fathers.

"Gragru seeks the dying place of the mammoth, the tomb of his people, that no man has ever seen or found.* I shall follow him to that place—learn the secret and mystery of where the mammoth goes to die!"

Quickly he bound on his snow-shoes, gained the top of the drifts, and forged away after Gragru, now a diminishing brown blotch in the middle distance.

CHAPTER II

Where Gragru Died

EVEN the elephant, degenerate modern nephew of Gragru's race, can outrun a good horse on a sprint or a day's march; and the beast Hok now followed was among the largest and most enduring of his kind. Despite the wound, the shaft in his body, and the deep snow, Gragru ploughed ahead faster than Hok's best pace.

The tall chieftain, however, had a plain trail to follow—a deep rut in the snow, with splotches and spatters of blood. "Gragru shall not escape," he promised himself, and mended his stride. The rising wind, bearing more snowflakes, blew at his wide shoulders and helped him along. Ahead was a ravine, its central watercourse many men's height deep under old snows. Gragru sagely churned along one slope, into country more than a day's journey from Hok's village. Hok had hunted there only a few times.

* Examination of the stomachs of frozen mammoth remains has enabled scientists to decide on juniper as a favorite article of their winter diet. —Ed.

* A similar legend is told about modern elephants and their "graveyard"—it is a fact that bodies of naturally dead elephants are seldom seen. The great beds of mammoth fossils in Russia, from which as much as 100,000 pounds of ivory was gleaned annually in pre-Soviet times, may bear out Hok's belief.—Ed.

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They travelled thus, hunter and hunted, all morning and all afternoon. Evening came, and Hok did not pause for a campfire, but gnawed a strip of dried meat as he marched. His longest pause was to melt snow between his ungloved hands for drink. Then on into the dusk. The clouds broke a little, and the light of a half-moon showed him the trail of Gragru.

With the coming of night he heard the howl of winter-famished wolves behind. They were hunting him, of course.* The safety of a tree, or at least a rock-face to defend his back, was the dictate of discretion; but Hok very seldom was discreet. He paused only long enough to cut a straight shoot of ash, rather longer than himself. Then, resuming his journey, he whittled it to a point with his deerhorn knife. This improvised stabbing spear he carried in his right hand, point backward.

The howling chorus of the wolves came nearer, stronger. It rose to a fiendish din as they sighted Hok. He judged that there were five or six, lean and savage. Without slacking his pace, he kept a watch from the tail of his eye. As they drew close to his heels, several gray forms slackened pace cautiously. Not so the leader—he dashed full upon Hok and sprang.

Hok had waited for that. Back darted his reversed spear. The tough ash pike met the wolf's breast in mid-air, the very force of the leap helped to impale the brute. There rose one wild scream of agony, and Hok let go of the weapon, tramping along. Behind rose a greedy hubbub—as he had foreseen, the other wolves had stopped and were devouring their fallen leader.

"The bravest often die like that," philosophized Hok, lengthening his stride to make up for lost time.

The long ravine came to a head in a frozen lake. Across this, to the south, brush-clad hills. Gragru's wallowing trail showed how hard he found those hills to climb, and Hok made up some of the distance he had lost on the levels. As the moon sank before morning, Hok caught up. Gragru had paused to rest, a great hunched hillock in a shaggy pelt. Hok yelled in triumph and Gragru, galvanizing into motion, slogged away southward as before.

ANOTHER day—second of pursuit, third of absence from home. Even Hok's magnificently trained legs must begin to suffer from so much snowshoeing; even Gragru's teeming reservoir of strength must run lower from pain and labor. Given a chance to idle and nurse himself, he could let the air clot and congeal the wounds, but the shaft still stuck through him, working and shifting to begin fresh bleedings. The trail now led through impeding thickets, and after a brief spurt by Gragru, Hok had a new advantage, that of using the mammoth's lane through the heavy drift-choked growth. By afternoon more snow fell, almost a blizzard. Lest he lose the trail entirely, Hok tramped in Gragru's very tracks instead of on the firmer drifts beside.

"He weakens," Hok told himself, eyeing new blood blotches. "At this point he rested on his knees. Yonder he fell on his side. Brave beast, to get up again! Will he reach the dying place?"

* Hok's people were contemporary with *Cyon alpinis fossils*, a species of wolf larger and stronger, and probably fiercer, than modern types. Such hunting animals must have had to pursue and drag down the powerful game of the age, and would not have shrunk too much from combat with man. At least once among the remarkable art-works of Stone Age man is included a painting of a wolf—a lifelike polychrome on the wall of the cavern at Font-de-Gaume, once the home and art studio of a community of the magnificent Cro-Magnons, Hok's race.—Ed.

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Full of admiration for Gragru, Hok half-wished the animal would triumph, but he did not slow down. Hok was weary, but warm from his exertions and far from faltering.

Night again. During the darkness Hok again kept up a dogged march. Up ahead somewhere, Gragru was forced to make a halt of it. His wound was doing its grim best to heal. Once or twice the mammoth's trunk reached back and investigated that lodged shaft. But there was too much wisdom in that high crag of a skull to permit tugging out of the painful thing—that would mean bleeding to death on the spot. Once again, as the deepest dark heralded the dawn, Hok drew nigh to his massive quarry. Once again Gragru stirred to motion, breaking trail for the third day of the chase.

The mighty stumpy feet were shaking and stumbling by now. Gragru fell again and again. He rose with difficulty after each fall, groaning and puffing but stubborn. A fresh hunter might have caught up—but Hok, however much he would not admit it, was himself close to the end of endurance. His deep chest panted like a bullfrog's. He breathed through his mouth, and the moisture made icicles in his golden beard. Frost tried to bite his face, and he rubbed it away with snow. Only his conscious wisdom kept him from tossing aside his furs as too much weight. By noon he made his first rest-stop. Knowing better than to sit down and grow stiff, he leaned his back to a boulder and gulped air into his laboring lungs. After he had paused thus, and eaten a mouthful of meat, he was no more than able to resume the pursuit, at a stubborn walk.

"Gragru," he addressed the fugitive up ahead, "you are strong and brave. Any man but Hok would say you had conquered. But I have not given up."

THE afternoon's journey led over a great flat plain, rimmed afar by white wrapped mountains and bearing no trees or watercourses that showed above the snow. Almost on its far side was a gentle slope to a ridge, with a peculiar length of shadow behind. Hok saw Gragru ahead of him. The mammoth could barely crawl through the drifts, sagging and trembling with weakness. Hok drew on his own last reserves of strength, stirred his aching feet to swifter snowshoeing. He actually gained.

Narrower grew the distance between them. Hok drew the axe from his belt, balanced it in his gloved right hand. Coming close, he told himself, he would hack the tendon of Gragru's hind leg, bring him down to stay. After that, get close enough to wrench out the piercing shaft, so that a final loss of blood would finish the beast. Then—but Hok could wish only for camp, a fire, sleep.

He toiled close. Closer. Gragru was only fifty paces ahead, tottering to that ridge of the slope. At its top he made a slow, clumsy half-turn. His head quivered between his big tussocked shoulders, his ears and trunk hung limply. His eyes, red and pained, fixed upon Hok's like the eyes of a warrior who sees death upon him. Hok lifted his axe in salute.

"Gragru, I am honored by this adventure," he wheezed. "Eating your heart will give me strength and wit and courage beyond all I have known. You will live again in me. Now, to make an end."

He kicked off the snowshoes, so as to run more swiftly at Gragru's sagging hindquarters. But, before he moved, Gragru acted on his own part. He stretched his trunk backward to the shaft in his wound.

Hok relaxed, smiling. "What, you

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would die of your own will? So be it! I yield you the honor of killing Gragru!"

The mammoth's trunk surged with all the strength it had left. Fastening on the head of the lance, it drew, dragged, pulled the shaft clear through and away. A flip of the trunk, and the red-caked weapon flew out of sight beyond the ridge. Then, blood fountaining forth on both sides, Gragru dragged himself after the shaft. He seemed to collapse beyond the ridge.

"He is mine," muttered Hok into the icicles on his beard, and lifted his axe. He ran in pursuit. So swift was he that he did not see what was on the other side of the ridge until too late.

There was no other side, really. Ground shelved straight down from that highest snow-clad point, into a vast, deep valley. There was a drop of eight or ten paces, then the beginning of a steep muddy slope. Hok felt a beating-up of damp warmth, like the rush of air from a cave heated with many fires. He saw thick, distant greenery below him, with a blue mist over it as of rain-clouds seen from a mountain top. All this in one moment.

Then his moccasins slid from under him on the brink, and he fell hard.

Striking the top of the slope all sprawling, he rolled over and then slid like an otter on a riverbank. Perhaps something struck his head. Perhaps he only closed his eyes as he slid.

In any case, Hok dropped into sleep as into warm water. He never even felt himself strike a solid obstruction and halt his downward slide.

CHAPTER III

The Jungle Beneath the Snow

HOK stretched, yawned, opened his eyes. "Where have I fallen?" he inquired of the world, and looked about to answer his own question.

He had plumped into a great bushy thicket of evergreen scrub, and had lain there as comfortably as in a hammock. By chance or instinct, he still clutched his big flint axe. Above him was the steep slope, and above that the perpendicular cliff with a crowning of snow. But all about him was a spring-like warmth, with no snow at all—only dampness.

Hok wriggled out of his branchy bed, examining himself. His tumble had covered his garments with muck. "Pah!" he condemned the mess, and used his gloves to wipe his face, hair and weapons. A look at the sky told him it was morning—he had slept away his fourth night from home.

Then he gazed downward. The valley seemed to throb and steam. He made out rich leafage and tall tree-summits far below. One or two bright birds flitted in the mists. Hok grimaced.

"Summer must sleep through the cold, like a cave-bear," he decided. "I will go down, and look for Gragru's body."

There were shoots and shrubs and hummocks for him to catch with hands and feet, or he would have gone sliding again. The deeper he journeyed, the warmer it became. Now and then he hacked a big slash on a larger tree, to keep his upward trail again. Those trees, he observed, were often summer trees, lusher and greener than any he had ever seen.

"Is this the Ancient Land of safe and easy life?" * he mused.

* Johannes V. Jensen, Danish poet and scholar, predicates his celebrated "Long Journey" saga on the race-old myth of a warm Lost Country—the memory among Ice-Age men of the tropical surroundings among which the earliest human beings developed, and which were banished by the glaciers.—Ed.

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He threw off leggins and gloves and the muddy lionskin cloak, tying these into a bundle to carry. Further descent into even more tropical temperature, and he hung the superfluous garments in a forked branch of a ferny thicket. "I will get them when I return," he decided, and went on down, clad only in clout and moccasins. Bow, quiver and pouch he slung from his shoulders. The deerhorn dagger rode in his leather girdle. His big axe he kept ready in his right hand, for what might challenge him.

The first challenger came, not up from the valley, but down from the misty air. Hok saw gray-green pinions, four times wider than his own arm-spread, and borne between them something like an evil dream of a stork. The wings rustled as they flapped—he saw, as they settled upon him, that they were unfeathered membranes like a bat's—and two scaly rear talons slashed at him.*

"Khaa!" cried Hok, revolted, and set himself for defense. He parried the rush with his axe. The side, not the edge, of the flint struck that monster's chest, blocking it off. Down darted the long lean neck, and the sharp-toothed beak fastened in Hok's hair. A moment later the clutching lizardy feet closed on the axe-haft. Hok found himself carried shakily aloft.

There was a struggle for the axe. The thing could barely sustain Hok's weight clear of the ground, and it tried to kill, not capture. A long tail belabored him like a club, hideous hand-like claws on the wing-elbows scratched and scrabbled at his chest and throat. Hok, dangling in midair, found himself able to voice a savage laugh.

"Ahai! You think to eat Hok, you nightmare? Others have found him a tough morsel!" Quitting hold of the axe with one hand, he whipped the dagger from his belt. Thrusting upward, he pierced the scaly throat to the bone.

THE jaws let go his hair, and emitted a startled screech. Snaky-smelling blood drenched Hok, and the two fell. The wings, though out of control, partially broke the tumble, and Hok had the wit and strength to turn his enemy under and fall upon it. They struck the slope some paces lower than where the fight began. Hok pinned the still struggling nightmare with his foot, and cleft it almost in two with his axe. Then he stepped clear, nose wrinkled in disgust.

"Khaa!" he snorted again, mopping away the ill-scented gore with handfuls of fern. "I'd have doubly died if that bird-snake had eaten me. Are there others?"

His question was answered on the instant. Dry flappings, shrill screams—Hok sheltered in a thicket, and watched a dozen more birdsnakes swoop down to rend and devour their slain brother. It was a sight to turn the stomach of a Gnorrl. Hok slipped away down slope.

Now he came to a gentler incline and larger trees. He journeyed on without mishap for the rest of the morning. Hungry, he ate several strange fruits from vine or tree at which he saw birds pecking. Once, too, a strange thing like a tiny tailed man* scolded him in a harsh high voice and flung down a big husk-fibered nut. Hok dodged the missile, split it and enjoyed both the white flesh and the milky juice.

* The race of pterodactyls, of which this specimen was a survivor, had wing-spreads as wide as twenty-five feet, with beaks four feet long.—Ed.

* In Europe, where Hok lived, no remains of native monkeys or apes more recent than Pliocene times have been discovered; but, as the paleontologist Osborn reminds us, the tree-dwelling habits of such beasts might have made the remains difficult to keep whole.—Ed.

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"Thanks, little brother!" he cried up at the impish nut-thrower.

When noon was past, Hok had come to where he could spy the floor of the valley.

With difficulty he spied it, for it was dusky dark. From it rose fumes, mist-clouds, earthy odors. It was a swamp, from which sprouted upward the tallest and biggest trees Hok had ever seen. They grew thickly, interlaced with the root-ends and butts of vines and creepers, hummocked around with dank clumps of fungi, rimmed with filthy pools. Swarms of biting insects rose, and Hok retreated, cursing.

"I see nothing of Gragru down there," he said. "I'll go sidewise."

Nicking a tree to mark the turnoff, he travelled directly along the slope. Nor had he far to go before he saw Gragru.

Here was the place where mammoths were entombed. Above, extending up the valley's slope, was a tunnel through trees and thickets, kept open by so many falling, rolling masses of dead or dying mammoth-meat. At the bottom of the chute rose a stinking stack of remains. Hok could not have counted them—there must be thousands of desiccated and rotted carcasses, the bones gray and the curling tusks white. On top lay the freshest of these, Gragru his quarry. And beside it was one that had beaten Hok to the kill.

"First bird-snakes," grumbled Hok. "Now elephant-pigs."

For the thing was bigger than an elephant and grosser than a hog. Its monstrous bulk, clad in scant-bristled hide of slate gray, stooped above the carcass. Its shallow, broad-snouted skull bent down, and powerful fangs tore the hairy hide from Gragru's flesh, exposing the tender meat. That head lifted as Hok came into view, a head larger than that of a hippopotamus. Two small hooded eyes, cold and pale as a lizard's, stared. The mouth sucked and chewed bloody shreds, and Hok saw down-protruding tusks, sharp as daggers. Upon the undeveloped brow, the swell of the muzzle, and the tip of the snout were hornlike knobs—three pairs of them.*

FIXING Hok with that lizardlike stare, the big brute set its elephantine forefeet upon Gragru's bulk and hitched itself nearer. Its bloody, fang-fringed jaws seemed to grin in anticipation of different meat.

"Thing," Hok addressed the monster, "you came unbidden to eat my prey. You yourself shall be my meat, to replace that which I killed."

He lifted his bow, which was ready strung, and reached over his shoulder for an arrow. Just then the elephant-pig moved toward him.

For all its unwieldy bulk, it came at antelope speed, that great toothed maw open to seize and rend. Hok swiftly drew his long arrow to the head and sent it full at the long protruding tongue. The monster stopped dead, emitting a shrill gargling squeal, and lifted one horn-toed foot to paw at the wound. Hok retired into a bushy thicket, setting another arrow to string.

That thicket would have shielded him from the charge of a buffalo or lion; but the bulk of the present enemy was to buffalo or lion as a fox to rabbits. It charged among the brush, breaking off stout stems like reeds. Hok, lighter, had difficulty getting aside from its first blind rush. He gained the open, and

* *Dinoceras ingens,* one of the largest and ugliest of the Dinocerata, flourished in Eocene times and may have lived later. It partook of the natures of rhinoceros and swine, and its teeth suggest it ate both animal and vegetable food. Its many head-bumps may have been primitive horns. Specimens have been found that were twelve feet long and eight feet tall at the shoulders.—Ed.

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so did the elephant-pig. It spied, wheeled to charge again.

He discharged a second arrow, full at one of those dead eyes. The six-knobbed head twitched at that moment, and the shaft skewered a nostril instead. Again a horrid yell of angry pain. Hok sprang away from under its very feet as it tried to run him down, found himself heading into the swampy bottom. There was a great cylindrical mass among the trees, a trunk which even this hideous monster could not tear down. Hok ran to it, seeking to climb the rough lappings of bark.

"You cannot climb quickly enough," said a voice from within the tree. "Come inside, where I can look at you."

CHAPTER IV

The Man Inside the Tree

IT IS often like that, even with a hunter as wise and sharp-eyed as Hok. Not until the voice spoke to him, in the language of men,* was he aware that near him in the great trunk was a gaping hole, big enough for him to slide through, and full of blackness.

The tree itself was not a tree. For trees are straight upward shoots of vegetable growth—this seemed a high-built, close-packed spiral, as if someone had coiled a rope, or a worm had made a great casting. Between two woody curves, one upon the other, showed the hole.

"Make haste," bade the voice inside.

Hok saw that the elephant-pig, after a momentary questing to spy and smell him out, was ponderously wheeling to charge. He waited for no third invitation, but dived into the space, head first. A struggle and a kick, and he was inside, among comforting dimness that bespoke solid protection all around. A moment later the huge beast struck outside, with a force that shook every fiber of the strange stout growth within which Hok had taken refuge.

"He cannot break through to us," assured the voice, very near. "This vine is stronger even than Rmanth, the slayer."

Hok made out a dark shape, slender and quiet. "Vine?" he echoed. "But this is a tree, a dead hollow tree."

"The tree that once stood here is not only dead, but gone," he was quietly informed. "If there were light, you would see."

Momentary silence, while Hok pondered this statement. Outside the elephant-pig, which seemed to be named Rmanth, sniffed at the orifice like a jackal at a rat-burrow.

"You don't sound like a mocker," was Hok's final judgment aloud. "And it is true that this is a strange growth around us. As for light, why not build a fire?"

"Fire?" repeated the other uncertainly. "What is that?"

Hok could not but chuckle. "You do not know? Fire lights and warms you."

"For warmth, it is never cold here. And for light—I do not like too much."

"There is need of light in this darkness," decided Hok weightily. "If you truly do not know fire, I can show better than I can tell."

He groped with his hands on the floor of the cavern into which he had come. It seemed earthy, with much rubbish.

* The old legend, mentioned in the book of Genesis and elsewhere, that once "all men were of one speech" may well be founded on fact—witness similarities of certain key words among races so far scattered as Welsh, Persian, and Mandan Indian. Even in the Stone Age there seems to have been commerce and alliance, which means that men must have understood each other. Languages were simple then. Only with widely divergent races, as the beastlike Gnorrls or Neanderthal men, would there be a definitely separate tongue, hard to pronounce and harder to understand because of differences in jaw structure, brain, and mode of life.—Ed.

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He found some bits of punky wood, then larger pieces, and cleared a hearth-space. From his pouch he brought needful things—a flat chip of pine, one edge notched; a straight, pointed stick of hard wood; a tuft of dry moss.

"Thus," lectured Hok, "is fire made."

Working in the dark, he twirled the stick between his palms. Its point, in the notch of the chip, rubbed and heated. Within moments Hok smelled scorching, then smoke. A faint glow peeped through the gloom. Lifting away the chip, Hok held his moss-tinder to the little coal of glowing wood-meal. The rising blaze he fed with splinters, then larger pieces. The fire rose. "There!" cried Hok, and had time and illumination to look up.

HIS first glance showed him the refuge—a circular cavity, twice a man's height in diameter, and walled snugly with those close-packed woody spirals. High above the space extended, with what looked like a gleaming white star at some distant apex. The floor was of well-trampled loam and mold, littered with ancient wood chips. His second glance showed him his companion.

Here was a body slimmer and shorter than the average man of the Flint People. The shoulders sloped, the muscles were stringy rather than swelling, there were no hips or calves. Around the slender waist was a clout rudely woven of plant fiber, its girdle supporting a queerly made little axe and what seemed to be a knife. The feet, outthrust toward Hok, looked like hands—the great toe was set well back, and plainly could take independent grasp. On the chest—quite deep in proportion to the slimness—and on the outer arms and legs grew long, sparse hair of red-brown color. Hok could not see the face, for the man crouched and buried his head in his long arms.

"Don't," came his muffled plea. "Don't. . . ."

"It will not hurt," Hok replied, puzzled.

"I cannot look, it burns my eyes. Once the forest was eaten by such stuff, that struck down from heaven—"

"Lightning," guessed Hok. "Oh, yes, fire can be terrible when big. But we keep it small, feeding it only sparingly. Then it is good. See, I do not fear. I promise it will not hurt you."

His tone reassured the man, who finally looked up, albeit apprehensively. Hok studied his face.

Long loose lips, a nose both small and flattish, and no chin at all beneath a scraggle of brown beard. From the wide mouth protruded teeth—Hok saw businesslike canines above and below, capable of inflicting a terrible bite. This much was plainly of animal fashion, unpleasantly Gnorrlish. But neither the fangs nor the shallow jaw could detract from the manifest intelligence of the upper face.

For here were large dark eyes, set very well under smooth brows. The forehead, though not high, was fairly broad and smooth, and the cranium looked as if it might house intelligence and good temper.*

"Don't be afraid," persisted Hok. "You were friendly enough to call me into this shelter. I am grateful, and I will show it."

RMANTHS, the monster outside, sniffed and scraped at the entrance. He seemed baffled. Hok leaned against the wall. "What is your name?" he asked.

The other peered timidly. Hok saw the size and brilliance of those eyes, and guessed that this man could see, at least somewhat in the dark. "Soko," came the reply. "And you?"

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"Hok the Mighty." That was spoken with honest pride. "I came here from snowy country up above. I had wounded a mammoth, and followed him down here."

"Mammoths always come here," Soko told him. "Rmanth and his people before him—for he is the last of a mighty race—ate their flesh and flourished. If we dare descend the trees, Rmanth kills and eats us, too. In the high branches—the Stymphs!"

"Stymphs?" echoed Hok. "What are those?"

Soko had his turn at being surprised at such ignorance. "They fly like birds, but are bigger and hungrier—with teeth in their long jaws—man cannot prevail against them—"

"Oh, the bird-snakes! One attacked me as I came down. I killed it, and descended before its friends came."

"You were climbing downward," Soko reminded. "There was cover below. But if you leave the cover to climb upward, you will be slain in the open, by many Stymphs. Not even Rmanth ventures above the thickets."

"As to your elephant-pig, Rmanth," continued Hok, "he has tasted my arrows."

That was another new word for Soko, and Hok passed his bow and quiver across for examination. "One shaft I feathered in his tongue," he contined, "and another in his nostril."

"But were forced to take shelter here. Meanwhile, those wounds will make him the thirstier for your blood. He will never forget your appearance or smell. If you venture out, he will follow you to the finish. Between him and the Stymphs above, what chance have you?"

"What chance have I?" repeated Hok, his voice ringing. "Chance for combat! For adventure! For Victory!" He laughed for joy, anticipating these things. "I'm glad I came—these dangers are worth traveling far to meet . . . but tell me of another wonder. This tree, which is not a tree, but shelters us in its heart—"

"Oh, simple enough," rejoined Soko. He was beginning to enjoy the comradeship by the glowing fire. Sitting opposite Hok, slender hands clasped around his knobby knees, he smiled. "A true tree grew here once, tall and strong. At its root sprang up a vine, which coiled tightly around like a snake. In time that vine grew to the very top. Its hugging coils, and its sap-drinking suckers, slew the tree, which rotted and died in the grip. But the vine held the shape to which it had grown, and when we tree-folk dug out the rotten wood, little by little, it made a safe tube by which we could descend to the valley's floor."*

"That must have taken much labor," observed Hok.

"And much time. My father's father barely remembered when it was begun, that digging."

"You speak as if you live up above here," said Hok.

"We do," Soko told him. "Come, kill the fire lest it burn the forest, and I will take you to the home of my people."

He rose and began climbing upward.

CHAPTER V

The World in the Branches

HOK quickly stamped out the fire. Its dying light showed him a sort of rough ladder—pegs and stubs of hard wood, wedged into the spaces between the coils of that amazing vine. Soko was swarming well above ground

*Several types of big tropical vine, both in Africa and South America, create this curious growth-pattern by killing the trees they climb and remaining erect in the same place.—Ed.

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level already. Slinging his weapons to girdle and shoulder-thongs, Hok followed.

Hok had always been a bold and active climber, able to outdistance any of his tribe-fellows, in trees or up cliffs. But Soko kept ahead of him, like a squirrel ahead of a bear. The tree-man* fairly scampered up the ladder-way.

"This is another way in which Soko's people are different from the Gnorrls," * muttered Hok.

The climbing-sticks had been meant for bodies of Soko's modest weight, and once or twice they creaked dangerously beneath the heavier Hok. He obviated the danger of a fall by keeping each hand and foot on a different hold, dividing the strain four ways. Meanwhile, the light above grew stronger, waxing and waning as Soko's nimble body cut this way and that across its beam. Finally, noise and bustle, and a new voice:

"Soko! You went down to see what was happening with Rmanth. What—"

"A man," Soko answered. "A strange man, like none you ever saw."

Hok took that as a compliment. He was considered something of a unique specimen, even among his own kind.

"He is master of the Hot Hunger," Soko went on, and Hok guessed that he meant fire. "He has killed one Stymph, he says, and has hurt Rmanth."

A chatter of several agitated voices above. Then, "Will he kill us?"

"I think not," said Soko, and drew himself through some sort of gap above. "Come on out, Hok," he called back. "My friends are eager to see you."

Hok came to the opening in turn. It was narrow for his big body, and he had difficulty in wriggling through. Standing on some crossed and interwoven boughs, he looked at Soko's people.

All the way up, he had thought of Soko as fragile and small; now he realized, as often before, that fragility and smallness is but comparative. Soko, who was a head shorter than himself and slim in proportion, would be considered sturdy and tall among the tree-folk—almost a giant. He was the biggest of all who were present. Hok smiled to himself. While he had been pegging Soko as a timid lurker in a hollow, these dwellers of the branches must have thrilled to the courage of their strong brother, venturing so close to the mucky domain of the ravenous Rmanth.

As Hok came fully into view, the gathering—there may have been twenty or thirty of Soko's kind, men, women and children—fell back on all sides with little gasps and squeaks of fearful amazement. With difficulty the chief of the Flint People refrained from most unmannerly laughter. If Soko was a strapping champion among them, Hok must seem a vast horror, strangely shaped, colored and equipped. He smiled his kindliest, and sat down among the woven branches.

"Soko speaks truth," he announced. "I have no desire to fight or kill anyone who comes in peace."

THEY still stood off from him, balancing among the leafage. He was aware that they moved so swiftly and surely because they got a grip on the branches with their feet. He was able, also, to make a quick, interested study of the world they lived in.

Though Soko had led him upward in a climb of more than twenty times a man's height, the upper hole in the vine spiral was by no means the top of the forest. Leafage shut away the sky above, the swampy ground below. Here, in the middle branches of the close-set

* The Neanderthal men were of massive, clumsy build—obviously poor climbers.—Ed.

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mighty trees, appeared something of a lofty floor—the boughs and connecting vines, naturally woven and matted together into a vast bridge of platform, swaying but strong. Layers of leaf-mold, mixed with blown dust, moss and the rotted meal of dead wood, overspread parts of this fabric. The aerial earthiness bore patches of grass and weeds, bright-flowering plants, as richly as though it were based upon the rock instead of the winds. Birds picked at seeds. Hok heard the hum of bees around trumpet-shaped blooms. It was a great wonder.*

"I wondered how you tree-men could possibly live off the ground," he said, with honest admiration. "Now I wonder how you can live anywhere else but here." A deep-chested sigh. "Of such fair places our old men tell us, in the legends of the Ancient Land."

That friendly speech brought the tree-dwellers closer to this big stranger. A half-grown lad was boldest, coming straight to Hok and fingering his leather moccasins. Hok's first thought was how swiftly young Ptao, at home by the frozen river, could thrash and conquer such a youth—his second was a hope that Ptao would be forebearing and gentle to so harmless a specimen. The others gathered around reassured. They began asking questions. It was strange to all that a human being could kill large beasts for food and fur, and the men were particularly fascinated by Hok's flint weapons.

"We have our own stories of old times, when your fathers made stone things," volunteered Soko. "Now we satisfy ourselves with what bones we can raid from that great pile of mammoths, when Rmanth is not there gorging himself." He produced his own dagger, smaller than Hok's reindeer-horn weapon, but well worked from a bone fragment. "After all, we need not fight monsters, like you."

"If you did fight like me, all together, and with wisdom and courage, Rmanth would not have you treed," said Hok bluntly. "Perhaps I can help you with him. But first, tell me more of yourselves. You think it strange that I wear skins. What are these weavings you wear?"

"The forest taught us," said Soko sententiously. "As the branches weave and grow together, so we cross and twine little tough strings and threads drawn from leaves and grasses. They give us covering, and places to carry possessions. Is it so marvelous? Birds do as much with their nests."

"NESTS?" repeated Hok. "And how do you people nest?"

"Like the birds—in woven beds of branches, lined with soft leaves and fiber. A roof overhead, of course, to shed the rain." Soko pointed to a little cluster of such shelters, not far away in an adjoining tree.*

"You do nothing but sleep and play?"

"We gather fruits and nuts," spoke up another of the tree-men. "That takes time and work, for a man who has gathered much must feed his friends who may have gathered little."

"It is so with my people, when one hunter kills much meat and others return empty-handed," nodded Hok. "What else, then?"

"A great labor is the mending of this floor," replied Soko, patting with his foot the woven platform. "Branches rot and break. We look for such places, through which our children might fall at play, and weave in new strong pieces, or tie and lace across with stout vines."

* This description is no fancy. The author himself, and many others, have seen such sky-gardens among the branches of modern rain-forests in West Africa.—Ed.

* The great apes make such nests, roofs and all.—Ed.

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Once again Hok glanced upward. "And what is there?"

A shudder all around. "Stymphs," muttered Soko, in a soft voice, as if he feared to summon a flock of the bird-snakes.

'Ugly thing," said Hok. "I may do something about them, too. But I am hungry just now—"

Before he could finish, the whole community dashed away like so many squirrels through the boughs, to bring back fistfuls of nuts, pawpaws and grapes. Hok accepted all he could possibly eat, and thanked his new friends heartily.

"I did not mean that you must feed me," he told them. "You should wait for me to finish my talk. But since you bring these fruits, I will make my meal of them. You may take my provision."

From his pouch he rummaged the remainder of his dried meat. It was one more new thing to the tree people, who nibbled and discussed and argued over it. Flesh they had occasionally—small climbers, fledgling birds, even insects—but nothing of larger game, and both cooking and drying of food was beyond their understanding. Hok chuckled over their naivete.

"A promise!" he cried. "I'll give you Rmanth himself for a feast, and I shall roast him on a fire, that which you call the Hot Hunger. But let Soko sit here by me. I want to hear of how you came to this place to live."

Soko perched on a tangle of vines. "Who can tell that? It was so long ago. Cold weather drove us from the upper world," and he pointed northward. "Those who stayed behind were slain by it. Our old men tell tales and sing songs of how the remnants of the fleeing tribe blundered in here and gave themselves up as trapped."

"Why did the ice not follow you in?" asked Hok.

"Ask that of the gods, who drove it to right and left of our valley. In any case, we were sheltered here, though there were many fierce creatures. But the cold was fiercer—we could not face it—and here we stay."*

"Treed by Rmanth and harried by those Stymph bird-snakes," summed up Hok. "You are happy, but you could make yourselves much happier by some good planning and fighting. Who is your chief?"

"I am their chief," growled someone behind him, "and you had better explain—quickly—why you seek to make my people dissatisfied."

CHAPTER VI

A Chief Passes Sentence

THERE was a sudden gasping and cowering among all the tree-folk, even as concerned the relatively sturdy Soko. Hok turned toward the speaker, expecting to come face to face with a fearsome challenger.

Around the spiral vine-column a little grizzled form was making its way. This tree-man was old and ill-favored, with almost pure white whiskers on his chinless jaw. He wheezed and snorted, as though the exertion were too much for him. Perhaps this was due to his weight, for he was the fattest Hok had yet seen among those dwellers of the trees. His belly protruded like a wallet, his jowls hung like dewlaps. But there was nothing old or infirm about

* The Piltdown Race seems to have flourished in the Third Interglacial Epoch, a warm age when even northern Europe was as pleasant and temperate as Italy. Such African-Asiatic fauna as hippopotami and tigers flourished side by side with these forerunners of human beings. When the Fourth Glaciation brought ice and snow to cover Europe, the robust Neanderthals and the later, greater true men of Hok's race could survive and adapt themselves; but a less rugged prehuman type like the Piltdown must flee or perish.—Ed.

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the power in his big, close-set brilliant eyes.

Gaining the side of the nearest tree-man to him, this oldster put out a confident hand and snatched away a sizeable slice of the dried meat Hok had distributed. Though the victim of this plunder was an active young man, he did not resist or even question, but drew diffidently away. The old man took a bite—his teeth, too, were young-seeming and rather larger and sharper than ordinary—and grunted approval. Then his eyes fastened Hok's, in a calculated stare of hostility.

But Hok had met the gaze of the world's fiercest beasts and men, and his were not the first eyes to falter. The old tree-chief finally glanced away. Hok smiled in good-humored contempt.

"Well?" challenged the oldster at last. "Do you know how to act before your betters?"

Hok was puzzled. The simple truth was that Hok had never recognized anyone as his better from his youth upwards.

Years before, when a big boy not yet fully mature, the slaying of his father by Gnorrls had made him chief of his clan. His young manhood had barely come to him before he had driven those same beastly Gnorrls from their rich hunting-empire of meadows and woods, and founded in their stead an alliance of several tribes, with himself as head chief. The mighty nation of Tlanis was sunken under the sea because of him. The Fishers in their seaside pile-villages had changed their worship from water-god to sun-god out of sadly learned respect for Hok. If ever he had been subordinate, even only the second greatest individual in any gathering, he had had plenty of time to forget it.

Just now he spat idly, through a gap in the woven branches.

"Show me my betters," he requested with an air of patience. "I know none, on two legs or four."

"I am Krol!" squeaked the other, and smote his gray-tufted chest with a fat fist. "Be afraid, you hulking yellow-haired stranger!"

"Men of the trees," Hok addressed those who listened, "is it your custom to keep fools to make game for you? This man has white hair, he should be quiet and dignified. He is a bad example to the young."

It was plainly blasphemy. Soko and the others drew further away from Hok, as though they feared to be involved in some terrible fate about to overwhelm him. The chief who called himself Krol fumbled in his girdle of twisted fiber, and drew forth an axe of mammoth ivory set in a hard-wood handle. Whirling it around his head, he cast it at Hok.

HOK lifted a big knowing hand, with such assurance that the movement seemed languid. The axe drove straight at his face, but he picked it out of the air as a frog's tongue picks a flying insect. Without pausing he whirled it in his own turn and sent it sailing back. It struck with a sharp *chock*, deep into a big branch just above Krol's head.

"Try again," bade Hok, as though he were instructing a child in how to throw axes.

Krol's big fangs gnashed, and foam sprank out in flecks upon his lips and beard. He waved his fists at his people.

"On him!" he screamed. "Seize him, beat him, bind fast his arms!"

Hok rose from where he sat, bracing himself erect. He looked with solemnity upon the half-dozen or so biggest men who moved to obey.

"Come at me, and you will think Rmanth himself has climbed up among you," he warned. "I do not like to be handled."

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Krol yelped a further order, backing it by a threat. The men rushed unwillingly.

Hok laughed, like an athlete playing with children. Indeed, the tree-men were childlike in comparison with him. He pushed the first two in the face with his palms, upsetting them and almost dropping them through the branchy fabric. A third attacker he caught and lifted overhead, wedging him in a fork of the boughs. The others retreated fearfully before such effortless strength. Hok laughed again, watching.

But he should have watched Krol as well. The plump old despot had stolen close unobserved. In one hand he clutched a big fiber husked nut, of the milky kind Hok had enjoyed earlier in the day. A swinging buffet on the skull, and Hok staggered, partially stunned. At once the tree-men rushed back, and before Hok could clear his brain and fight them off, he was swamped. They looped his wrists, ankles and body with quickly-plucked vine tendrils, tough and limber as leather straps.

Krol found time to take some fruit from a child, and husk it with his teeth. "Now, stranger," he sniggered, "you will learn that I am chief here."

Hok had recovered from that stroke. He did not waste strength or dignity by striving against his stout bonds.

"A chief who plays tricks and lets other men do the fighting," he replied. "A chief who strikes his enemies foully, from behind."

Krol had repossessed his ivory axe. He lifted it angrily, as though to smite it into Hok's skull. But then he lowered it, and grinned nastily.

"I heard you blustering when I came up," he said. "Something about fighting. What do you think to fight?"

"I spoke of Rmanth, the elephant-pig," replied Hok. "Yes, and the Stymphs. Your people fear them. I do not."

"Mmmm!" Kroll glanced downward, then up. "They are only little pests to mighty warriors like you, huh? You do not fear them? Hok—that it your name, I think you said—I will do you a favor. You shall have closer acquaintanceship with the Stymphs."

MENTION of the dread bird-snakes made the tree-folk shiver, and Krol sneered at them with a row of grinning fangs.

"You cowards!" he scolded. "You disgrace me before this boastful stranger. Yet you know that Stymphs must eat, if they are to live and let us alone. Hoist this prey up to them."

"Bound and helpless?" demanded Hok. "That is a part of your own cowardice, Krol. You shall howl for it."

"But you shall howl first, and loudest," promised Krol. "You biggest men, come and carry him up. Yes, high!"

That last was to quicken the unwilling limbs of his fellows, who seemed to like Hok and not to like the prospect of mounting into the upper branches.

Thus driven to obedience, four of the biggest men nimbly rove more vines around the captive, fashioning a sort of hammock to hold him and his weapons. Soko, stooping to tie a knot, gazed intently into Hok's face. One of Soko's big bright eyes closed for a moment—the ancient and universal wink of alliance, warning, and promise.

The four scrambled up and up, bearing Hok among them. Now the sky came into view, dullish and damp but warm. Apparently the valley was always wreathed, at least partially, in light mists. Into a tall treetop the big captive was hoisted, and made fast there like a dangling cocoon. Krol

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panted fatly as he clambered alongside. The others departed at his nod. Krol, passing Hok, jostled the big bound wrists. Hok felt something pressed against his palm, and closed his fingers upon it.

The hilt of Soko's bone knife! With difficulty he fought back a smile of triumph. . . .

Then he was alone in the treetop with Krol.

"Look up, you scoffer,' bade Krol. "In the mists—do you see anything?"

"Very dimly, I make out flying shapes," replied Hok quietly. "Two—three—no, many."

"They can see you, and plainly," Krol informed him. "Like my people, the Stymphs have ability to see far on dull days, or dark holes, or even at night. They have cunning sense of smell, too. Probably they scent some prey close at hand now, and wonder if I have hung something up for them."

"You hang food for the Stymphs?" demanded Hok.

"Yes, such men as displease me—don't stare and wonder. I am chief of my tribe. I must keep an alliance with other powers."

Krol squinted upward, where the Stymphs hovered in the mist-wreaths. Opening his wide mouth, he emitted a piercing cry, half howl and half whistle. The bird-snakes began to flap as if in response.

"They know my voice, they will come," announced Krol. With the evillest of grins, he swung down to the safety of the foliage below.

No sooner was he gone than Hok began to ply that bone knife Soko had smuggled to him. It was difficult work, but he pressed the well-sharpened edge strongly against the vine loops around his wrist. They separated partially, enough to allow him to strain and snap them. Even as the boldest Stymph lowered clear of the mists and began to angle downward, Hok won his arms free. A few mighty hacks, and he cleared away the rest of his hammocky bonds.

The tree-folk had bound his unfamiliar weapons in with him. Drawing himself astride of a big horizontal branch, Hok strung the big bow and tweaked an arrow out of his quiver.

"I have a feeling," he said aloud to this strange land at large, "that I was sent here—by gods or spirits or by chance—to face and destroy these Stymphs."*

CHAPTER VII

The Stymphs

SO CONFIDENT was Hok of his ability to deal with the situation that he actually waited, arrow on string, for a closer mark. After all, he had killed one such bird-snake with a single quick thrust of his dagger. Why should he fear many, when he had arrows, an axe, and two knives? A big Stymph tilted in the mist and slid down as if it were an otter on a mud-bank. Its long triangular head, like the nightmare of a stork, drooped low on the snaky neck. Its jag-toothed bill opened.

Hok let it come so close that his flaring nostrils caught the reptilian odor; then, drawing his shaft to its barbed head of sandstone, he loosed full at the scaly breast. Hok's bow was the strongest among all men of his time,

* Readers who know the mythology of ancient Greece will already have seen some connection between the surviving pterodactyls called Stymphs and the Stymphalides, described as "great birds" who ate men. The ancient Greeks said that the Stymphalides had plumage of metal, which sounds very much like reptilian scaliness. Hercules, the Grecian memory of Hok, is credited with destroying these monsters as one of his twelve heaven-assigned labors.—Ed.

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and a close-delivered arrow from it struck with all the impact of a war-club. The flint point tore through the body, flesh, scales and bone, and protruded behind. The swoop of the Stymph was arrested as though it had blundered against a rock in mid-air. It whirled head over lizard tail, then fell flooping and screeching toward the great mass of foliage below.

"Ahai!" Hok voiced his war-shout, and thundered mocking laughter at the other Stymphs. "Thus Hok serves those who face him. Send me another of your champions!"

Several of the abominations had flown a little way after their falling friend. But, before they could get their cannibal beaks into the stricken body, it had lost itself among the branches, and they came up again to center on the more exposed meat in the treetop. Two advanced at once, and from widely separate angles.

Hok had notched another arrow, and sped it into the chest of one. Before he could seize a third shaft, the other Stymph was upon him. Its talons made a clutch, scraping long furrows in his shoulder. He cursed it, and struck a mighty whipping blow with his bow-stave that staggered it in mid-flight. Clutching the supporting branch with his legs, he tore his axe from its lashing at his girdle, and got it up just in time to meet the recovering drive of the brute. Badly gashed across the narrow, evil face, the Stymph reeled downward, trying in vain to get control of its wings and rise again.

More Stymphs circled this third victim of Hok, and tore several bloody mouthfuls from it. A loud clamor rose over Hok's head—the smell of gore was maddening the flock. Slipping his right hand through the thong on his axe handle, he looked up.

The sky was filling with Stymphs. Though never a man to recognize danger with much respect, Hok was forced to recognize it now. Where he had thought to meet a dozen or score of the monsters, here they were mustered in numbers like a flock of swallows—his system of counting, based on tens and tens of tens, would not permit him to be sure of their strength, even if he had time.

For they had dropped all over him, all of them at once.

A TOOTHY jaw closed on his left elbow. Before it could bite to the bone, he whipped his axe across and smashed the shallow skull with the flat of the blade. Back-handing, he brought the axe round to smite and knock down another attacker. Axe and bow-stave swept right and left, and every blow found and felled a Stymph. The stricken ones were attacked and rended by their ravenous fellows, which made a hurly-burly of confusion and perhaps saved Hok from instant annihilation by the pack. As it was, he knew that the Stymphs were far too many for him.

The end of this furious struggle in the open top of the jungle came with an abrupt climax that Hok never liked to remember afterward. He had ducked low on his limb to avoid the sweeping rush of a big Stymph, and for a moment loosened the straddle-clutch of his legs. At the same moment another of the creatures dropped heavily upon his shoulders, sinking its claws into his flesh. Its weight dislodged him. Hok lost all holds, and fell hurtling into the leafy depths below.

His right hand quitted its hold on the big axe, which remained fast to his wrist by the looped thong. Reaching up and back as he fell, he seized the Stymph by its snaky throat and with a single powerful jerk freed it from its

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grasp upon his ribs and brought it under him. Its striving wings were slowing the fall somewhat, though it could not rise with his weight. A moment afterward, the two of them crashed into the mass of twigs and leaves, hit an outthrust bough heavily.

The Stymph, underneath, took most of that shock. Its ribs must have been shattered. At the instant of impact, Hok had presence of mind to quit his grip upon its neck, and managed to fling his arm around the branch. He clung there, feet kicking in space, while the Stymph fell shrieking into the middle branches.

Again he was momentarily safe. He looked up. The Stymphs, where they were visible through sprays of greenery, were questing and circling to find him, like fish-hawks above the water's surface.

"Ahai! Here I am, you bird-snakes!" he roared his challenge, and climbed along the branch to a broader fork, where he could stand erect without holding on. And here he found shelter, even from those ravenous beaks and claws.

A great parasitic growth, allied to giant dodder or perhaps mistletoe, made a great golden-leafed mat above him, circular in form and wider across than the height of two tall men. It could be seen through, but its tough tendrils and shoots could hold back heavier attacks than the Stymph swarm might manage.

"Come on and fight!" he taunted again. "I have killed many of you, and still I live! Ahai, I am Hok the Mighty, whose sport it is to kill Stymphs and worse things than Stymphs!"

THE flattened, darkling brains of the Stymphs understood the tone, if not the words of that defiance. They began to drop down on winnowing scaly wings, peering and questing for him. "Here, just below!" he cried to guide them. Then he slung his bow behind him, and poised his axe, spitting between hand and haft for a better grip.

They settled quickly toward him, wriggling and forcing their way through the upper layers of small twigs. He laughed once again, and one of the Stymphs spied him through the tangled matting. It alighted, clutching the strands with its talons, and with a single lancing stroke of its tight-shut beak drove through a weak spot in the shield. Hok stared into its great cold eyes, and shifted his position to avoid its snap.

"Meet Hok, meet death," he said to it, and chopped off that ugly head with his axe. The body flopped and wriggled beyond his jumble of defending vegetation, and three of the other Stymphs came down all together to feast upon it.

That was what Hok wanted. "So many guests come to dine with Hok?" he jibed. "Then the host must provide more meat."

He laid his longest arrow across the bow-stave. For a moment the three fluttering bird-snakes huddled close together above the prey, almost within touch of him. Setting the head of his arrow to an opening among the whorls and tangles, he loosed it at just the right moment.

A triple shrillness of pained screaming beat up, and Hok was spattered with rank-smelling blood. Skewered together like bits of venison on a toasting-stick, the three Stymphs floundered, somersaulted and fell, still held in an agony of conjunction by Hok's arrow. For the first time, unhurt Stymphs drew back as in fear. Hok made bold to show himself, climbing up on top of his protecting mat.

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There below him lay a fertile valley of wonders

"Do you go?" he demanded. "Am I as unappetizing as all that?"

They came yet again, and he dodged nimbly back into safety. More arrows—he had a dozen left. These he produced, thrusting them through broad leaves around him so as to be more quickly seized and sped. Then, as the Stymphs blundered heavily against his shield of natural wickerwork, he began to kill them.

Close-packed as they were, and within touch of him, he could not miss. By twos and threes his arrows fetched them down. Even the small reptile-minds of the flying monsters could not but register danger. Survivors began to flop upward, struggle into the open air above the branches, retreat into the mist. Hok hurled imprecations and insults after them, and once more mounted the mat to kill wounded wretches with his axe, and to drag his arrows from the mass of bodies.

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The snake crawled out on the sharpened stick

help, down here in the mists beyond the reach of his rays. My children shall never forget this kindness."*

From below came an awkward scrambling, and Krol, the chief of the tree-folk, mounted upward into view.

"Greetings," Hok chuckled at him. "See what sport I have made with your friends, the bird-snakes."

Krol might have feared the huge, blood-smeared chief of the Flint People, had he not been so concerned with the retreat of the Stymphs overhead.

"They will go," he chattered. "They will never come back, because they fear you. If I had known—"

* The surviving myth tells how Hercules (Hok) was sheltered from the Stymphalides by the buckler of Pallas Athene, so that he was able to win victory at leisure.—Ed.

Hok's mighty axe swung back

WELL-MANNERED as always, he took time to thank the curious tangled growth that had been his bulwark. "My gratitude to you, who made me a shield from behind which I won this victory," he addressed it. "You were sent from the Shining One, whom I worship. He knew I needed

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"If you had known, you would not have hung me up for them to eat," Hok finished for him. "As it is, I have driven off your ugly allies, by fear of which you ruled your people. That fear will be gone hereafter. So, I think, will you."

Hok swung down to a branch above Krol and feinted a brain-dashing blow with his axe. Then he laughed as the tree-chief let go all holds, dropping six times his own length through emptiness. He caught a branch below.

"You and I are enemies!" he snarled upward. "Though you have beaten my Stymphs, there remain other things — even Rmanths! I shall see you dead, and your body rended by the tusks of Rmanth, Hok the Meddler!"

And then, though Hok began climbing swiftly downward, old Krol was swifter and surer. They both descended through thickening layers of foliage, to the woven living-place of the tree people.

CHAPTER VIII

The Dethroning of Krol

BY the time the slower-climbing Hok had come down to that mighty hammocklike footing, Krol had had precious minutes to gather his followers and howl orders and accusations into their ears.

"Ah, here he comes to mock us, the overgrown invader!" Krol yelled, and shook a furious finger toward the approaching Hok. "He has slain the Stymphs, who protected us!"

"I have slain the Stymphs, who feasted on any tree-man daring to climb as high as the open air above the forest," rejoined Hok, with a lofty manner as of one setting Krol's statement right. "I have helped you, not injured you."

Krol glared with a fury that seemed to hurl a rain of sparks upon Hok. "You biggest men," he addressed the other tree-folk out of the side of his broad, loose mouth, "seize him and bind him a second time."

Hok set his shoulder-blades to the main stem of a tree. He looked at the tree-men. They seemed a trifle embarrassed, like boys stealing from a larder. Soko, tht biggest among them, was plainly the most uneasy as well. Hok decided to profit by their indecision.

"You caught me once because I was playful among you," he said. "Hok never makes the same mistake twice. Standing thus, I cannot be knocked down from behind. Meanwhile," and he quickly strung his bow, notching an arrow, "I shall not only strike my attackers, I shall strike them dead."

"Obey me!" blustered Krol, and one of the men lifted a heavy milk-nut to throw. Hok shot the missle neatly out of the hand that held it.

"No throwing," he warned. "Charge me if you will, but make it a fight at close quarters. Those who survive will have a fine tale to tell forever." He glanced sideways, to a gap in the matting. "But the first man to come within my reach I shall cast down there. Krol, is your other ally, Rmanths, hungry?"

The half-formed attack stood still, despite Krol's now hysterical commands to rush Hok. When the old tree-chief had paused, panting for breath, Hok addressed the gathering once again:

"You cannot hope to fight me, you slender ones. The Stymphs, who have held you frightened for so long, fell dead before me like flies in the frost. Of us two — Hok or Krol — who is greatest?"

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"Hok is greatest," announced Soko suddenly.

It was plain that none had dared suggest rebellion against Krol since the beginning of time. Krol was as taken aback as other hearers. Soko turned toward Krol, and the old chief actually shrank back.

"He admits killing the Stymphs, he admits it!" jabbered Krol, flapping a nervous paw at Hok. "If they are gone, how shall strangers be kept out of this land of ours?"

HOK guessed that this was an ancient and accepted argument. The tree-folk naturally feared invasion, must have been taught to think of the Stymphs as their guardians against such a danger. He snorted with scornful amusement.

"The old liar speaks of 'this land of yours,' " he repeated. "How is it your land, men of the trees, when you can neither tread its soil nor look into its sky—when bird-snakes prey on you above, and an elephant-pig prowls below, so that you must dwell forever in this middle-part like tree frogs?" He paused, and judged that his question had struck pretty close to where those folk did their thinking. "I have been your benefactor," he summed up. "The open air is now yours, for Krol says the Stymphs have fled from it. The next step is—"

"To kill Rmanths?" suggested someone, a bolder spirit among the hearers.

"The next step," finished Hok, "is to get rid of that tyrant Krol."

Krol had drawn back into a sort of tangle of branches and vines, which would serve as a partial screen against any rush. He snarled, and hefted his ivory-bladed axe in one hand.

"You speak truth, Hok," put in Soko, more boldly than before. "Go ahead and kill Krol."

But Hok shook his golden shock-head. "No. I could have done that minutes ago, with a quick arrow, or a flick of my axe. But I have left him for you yourselves to destroy. He is your calamity, your shame. He should be your victim."

Krol made play with his axe. "I will hew you all into little shreds!" he threatened in a high, choked voice. Soko was the first to see how frightened the old despot was. He addressed his fellows:

"Men of my people, if I kill Krol, will I be your chief?" he asked. "Such is custom."

Several made gestures of assent, and Soko was satisfied.

"Then I challenge him now." With no wait for further ceremony, Soko put out one lean, knowing hand and borrowed a weapon from the woven girdle of a neighbor. It was a sort of pick, a heavy, sharp piece of bone lashed crosswise in the cleft of a long, springy rod. He approached Krol's position.

"Come and be killed," Soko bade his chief, in a sort of chant. "Come and be killed. Come and—"

Krol came, for he was evidently not too afraid of anything like an even battle. Hok, a giant and a stranger, had terrified him. The repudiation of the whole tribe had unmanned him. But if Soko was alone a challenger, Krol intended to take care of his end.

There was still pith in his pudgy old arm as he swung the ivory axe at Soko. The younger warrior parried the blow within a span's distance of his face, missed a return stroke with the pick. A moment later they were fencing furiously and quite skillfully, skipping to and fro on the shaky footing. Hok, who had a fighting man's appreciation of duelling tactics, watched with interest.

"Well battled!" he voiced his ap-

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plause. "Strike lower, Soko, his guard is high! Protect your head! Don't stumble or—Hai! Now he is yours!"

INDEED, it seemed so. Krol had feinted Soko into a downward sweep with the pick, and had slipped away from the danger. With Soko momentarily off balance, Krol struck with his axe; but a quick upward jerk of Soko's weapon-butt struck his wrist, numbing it. The axe fell among the trampled leaf-mold on the branchy mat. Krol was left unarmed before Soko.

Now despair made the challenged chief truly dangerous. Krol sprang before Soko could land a last and fatal stroke. He threw his arms around Soko's body, and sank his sharp fangs into Soko's flesh at juncture of neck and shoulder. The two scrambled, fell, and rolled over and over, perilously close to a terrible fall. The chattering onlookers danced and gesticulated in pleased excitement.

Hok, whose own teeth were far too even for use as weapons, was about to remark that biting seemed grossly unfair, when the issue was decided. Soko tore loose from the grip of Krol's jaws and turned the old man underneath. Krol doubled a leg and strove to rip Soko's abdomen open with the nails of his strong, flexible toes, but a moment later Soko had hooked his own thumbs into Krol's mouth corners. He forced his enemy's head back and back, until the neck was on the point of breaking. With a coughing whine, Krol let go all holds, jerked himself free, and next moment ran for his life.

At once the spectators gave a fierce shout, and joined the chase. Hok, following over the swaying mass of boughs, could hear a hundred execrations being hurled at once. Apparently every man and woman, and most of the children, among the tree-folk had a heavy score to settle with the fierce old fraud who had ruled them. Soko, leading the pack, almost caught up with Krol. But Krol avoided his grasp, and disappeared into something.

Hok came up, pushing in among the yelling tree-men. He saw a new curiosity—Krol's fortress.

It was made like the nest of a mud-wasp, a great egg-shaped structure of clay among the heavier branches of a tall tree. Apparently Krol had spent considerable time and thought on his refuge, against just such an emergency as this. Hok judged that within was a baskety plaiting of chosen branches, with the clay built and worked on the outside thickly and smoothly. The whole rondure was twice Krol's height from top to bottom, and almost the same distance through. It was strongly lodged among several stout forks, and had but one orifice. This was a dark doorway, just large enough for Krol to slip through and perhaps a thought too narrow for shoulders the width of Soko's.

"Krol's nest is well made," Hok pronounced, with frank admiration. "My own tribesmen sometimes make their huts like this, of branches with an outer layer of earth. Why are not all your homes so built?"

THE yelling had died down. Soko, his big eyes watching the doorway to the mud-nest, made reply: "Only Krol could fetch clay. We dare not go to the valley's floor after it."

"No," rejoined a grumble from inside. "Nor do you dare go after—*water!*"

That reminder plainly frightened every hearer. They drew back from the den of Krol, looked at each other and at Soko.

"What does he mean?" demanded Hok. "Water does he say? When it

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comes to that, where do you get water?"

Soko pointed to the opening. "He gets it. Krol." Soko's throat, still torn and chewed from the battle, worked and gulped. "We should have thought of that. Without Krol, we can get nothing to drink."

One or two of his hearers made moaning sounds and licked their mouths, as if already dry and thirsty. Hok questioned Soko further. It developed that the tree-folk had big dry gourd-vessels, fashioned from the fruit of lofty vines, and these they let down on cords of fiber. Krol, the single individual who would venture to the ground level, scooped up water from a stream there, and the others would draw it up for their own use. Hok nodded, praising in his heart the wisdom of Krol.

"It is yet another way in which he kept his rule over you," he commented. "Yet Krol must die some day. How would you drink then?"

"When I die, you all die," pronounced Krol from his fastness. "I declare you all in danger. Without me to guide your gourds into that stream, thirst will claim you one by one."

Silence. Then a wretched little man attempted a different question:

"What is your will, mighty Krol?"

Krol kept majestic silence for a moment. Finally:

"You will all swear to obey my rules and my thoughts, even unspoken wishes. You will range far to pluck all the fruits I like, and bring them to me. You will yield Soko up as a victim—"

"Wait, you tree people!" burst out Hok in disgust. "I see you wavering! Do you truly mean to let that murderer destroy Soko, who is the best man among you?"

Nobody answered. Hok saw them stare sickly. Krol went on:

"I have not finished. Soko as a victim, I say. And also this troublesome stranger, Hok. Their blood will increase my walls."

CHAPTER IX

The Hot Hunger Obliges

FOR a moment Hok had an overpowering sense of having guessed wrong.

He had spoken the truth when he announced that the killing of Krol was the tree-men's responsibility, not his. Violent death was no novelty in his life, and he had inflicted enough of it on large, strong foes to be hesitant about attacking weak, unworthy ones. Too, he had no wish to take on the rule of Krol's people as an additional chore. If Soko, who seemed a fair chieftainly type, did the killing, then Soko would confirm himself as leader. Hok could depart from this Ancient Land with a clear conscience.

But just now his half-languid forbearance was shunting him into another nasty situation. Three or four of the men were murmuring together, and there was a stealthy movement of the clan's whole fighting strength in the direction of Soko. At once Hok pushed forward at and among them. Quick flicks of his open hands scattered them like shavings in the wind.

"Fools!" he scolded them. "Weak of wit! You deserve no better than a life roosting in these trees. Soko and I have brought you to the edge of freedom, and you cannot take advantage!"

"That is good talk," seconded Soko, with considerable stoutness. "Krol has fled before me. Since he will not fight, I am chief. Let any one man among you come and strive with me if he thinks otherwise."

The half-formed uprising was quelled. One or two men fidgeted.

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Said one: "But who will fetch us water?"

"Who but Krol?" chimed in the old rascal from behind his mud walls. "I make no more offers until you come to me with thirsty throats, begging."

The speaker glanced sidelong at Hok. He half-whispered: "Krol wants the blood of Soko and the stranger—"

"He shall have blood enough and to spare, if you even think of fighting," Hok cut him off roughly. "Krol spoke of using it 'for the thickness of his walls.' What did he mean?"

Soko pointed to the den. "He mixes earth with blood, and it turns into stone."

Hok came toward the big egg of clay, and saw that Soko spoke truth. The texture of that fortress was more than simple dried mud. Hok prodded it with his finger, then a dagger-point, finally swung his axe against it. He made no more than a dint. Even his strength and weapons could not strip that husk from Krol.*

"Hai, the old coward has built strongly," he granted. "Well, the front door is open. Shall I fetch him out?"

Soko nodded eagerly, and Hok cut a long straight shoot from a nearby branch. This he poked in through the entrance hole. It encountered softness, and Hok grinned at the howl that came back. Then the end of the stick was seized inside, and he grinned more widely.

"Do you think to match pulls with Hok?" he queried. "A single twitch, and you come out among us."

SUITING action to word, he gave his end a sharp tug. Krol let go, and Hok almost fell over backward as the stick came into view.

But upon it was something that made the tree-folk scream with one voice of horror, while Hok himself felt a cold chill of dismay.

Krol had clung to the end of the stick only long enough to attach a peculiar and unpleasant weapon of his own—a small, frantic snake banded in black and orange. This creature came spiralling along the pole toward Hok, plainly angry and looking for trouble. Hok dropped the pole, grabbing for his bow. Fallen upon the woven floor, the snake turned from him to Soko, who was nearest at the moment. Soko scrambled away, bellowing in fear.

But then Hok had sent an arrow at it, and spiked it to a lichen-covered stub of bough that thrust into view from the platform. The ugly little creature lashed to and fro like a worm on a fish-hook. Its flat head, heavily jowled with poison sacs, struck again and again at the shaft that pierced it.

"*Wagh!*" cried Hok, and spat in disgust. "The touch of that fang is death. Does Krol live with such friends?"

"Snakes do not bite Krol," volunteered Soko, returning shakily.

"I do not blame them," rejoined Hok. "Well, he seems prepared for any assault. Siege is the alternative."

"I am thirsty," piped up a child from behind its watching mother. Hok ordered a search for milk-nuts, and half the tribe went swinging away through the boughs to bring them. Soko lingered at Hok's elbow.

"Hok! Only the death of Krol will save us. There are some in the tribe who will slay us if we sleep, if we relax watch even—"

"And your blood will plaster my walls afresh," promised Krol, overhear-

* Blood and earth, mixed into a primitive cement, dates back to long before the dawn of history. It is fairly universal among the simple races of the world, and is used to make durable hut-floors in both Africa and South America. The blending calls for considerable judgment and labor; the author has seen samples, and has tried to imitate them for himself, but with only indifferent success.—Ed.

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ing.

Hok made another close inspection of Krol's defenses, keeping sharp lookout lest Krol turn more snakes upon him. He hacked experimentally at several of the branches that supported the structure, but they were tough and thick, would take days to sever. After a moment, inspiration came to him. He began to prune at nearby twigs and sticks, paying especial attention to dry, dead wood. Soon he had cleared most of the small branches from around the den, and stacked his cuttings carefully to one side.

"What will you do to force him out?" asked Soko.

"It is not I who will force him out," replied Hok cryptically. "It is my friend, the Hot Hunger."

"The Hot Hunger!" repeated Krol and his voice sounded hollow.

AS THE nut-gatherers returned, Hok gave them another errand, the collection of small faggots of dry branches. They obeyed readily, for Krol voiced no more threats, and Soko was acting the part of a chief. As the little stores of fuel came in, Hok began to peg and tie them to the outside of the clay den. Finally, while all watched in round-eyed wonder, he fished forth his fire-making apparatus.

Upon a thick carpet of green leaves he kindled the smallest of fires. All but Soko, who had seen fire-building once before, whimpered and drew away. Hok was all the more glad, for he wanted no crowding and bough-shaking to set the tree tops ablaze. Having found and kindled a torch to his liking, he stamped out the rest of the fire with his moccasin heel and returned to the fuel-festooned den of Krol.

He ignited the broken, splintery end of a twig. It flared up, and other pieces of wood likewise. Hok nodded approval of his work.

"See, it will soon be night," he announced. "Will someone bring me a little food? I shall watch here."

"Watch what?" asked one of the tree folk.

"Krol's embarrassment. Where are some of those milk-nuts?"

Twilight was coming on, with dusk to follow. Most of the tree-men led their families to distant nests, peering back in worried wonder. Soko remained with Hok.

"You are going to burn Krol," guessed Soko, but Hok shook his head in the firelight, and pegged more sticks to the blood-mingled clay.

"Help me to spread thick, moist leaves to catch any fire that falls, Soko. No, Krol will not wait long enough to be burned. Eventually he will come forth to face us."

From within the den came a stronge sound, half wheeze and half snarl.

"You are a devil, Hok," Krol was mumbling. "It grows hot in here."

Soko was encouraged. "Come and be killed," he set up his chant of challenge. "Come and be killed. Come and be killed."

Krol wheeze-snarled again, and fell silent. Hok fed his fire judiciously. The blood-clay cement was scorching hot to his fingertips. Dusk swiftly became night.

"Hok, listen," ventured Krol after a time. "You and I are reasonable men. Perhaps I was wrong to make an enemy of you. You are wrong to remain an enemy of mine. I have it in mind that you and I could do great things. Your strength, with my wits—"

"This talk is not for bargaining, but to throw us off guard," Hok remarked sagely to Soko.

SOKO peered into the dark opening of the den. "Come and be killed,"

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he invited Krol.

Krol wheezed again, this time with a sort of sob as obligato.

"Your hearts are as hard as ivory," he accused shakily. "I am old and feeble. The things I did may have been mistakes, but I was trying to help my people. Now I must die horribly, of the Hot Hunger, because a big yellow-haired stranger has no mercy."

Hok lashed a handful of fresh fuel together with a green vine and tied it to a peg he had worked into the clay, setting this new wood afire.

"I judge that Krol is at his most dangerous now," he told Soko. "Beware of those who seek to make you sorrow for them. Tears bedim the eyes."

"Come and be killed," repeated Soko.

He had come quite close to the opening, and Krol made his last bid for victory and safety.

He dived forth, swift and deadly as the little coral snake he had attempted to use against Hok. The impact of his pudgy old body was enough to bowl over the unready Soko.

Winding his legs and one arm around the body of his younger rival, he plied with his free hand a long bone dagger.

Hok, on the other side of the fiery den, hurried around just in time to see two grappled bodies roll over, and then fall through a gap in the broad mat. Two yells beat up through the night—Soko's voice raised in startled pain, Krol's in fierce triumph. Then, as Hok reached the gap, there was only one voice:

"There, Soko, hang like a beetle on a thorn! You shall have time to think of my power before you die! I, Krol, depart for Rrmanths, my only friend, whom I shall feed fat with the corpses of my rebellious people!"

CHAPTER X

Hok Accepts a Challenge

IN THE complete darkness, climbing might have been a dire danger; but the fire that still burned around the abandoned fortress of Krol shed light below. Hok was able to find footing among the branches, and to descend with something of speed.

At a distance of some twenty paces below the matted mid-floor of the jungle, he found Soko. His friend seemed to dangle half across a swaying branch-tip, struggling vaguely with ineffectual flaps of arms and legs. Of Krol there was no glimpse or sound.

"Soko, you still live!" cried Hok. "Come with me, we will hunt for Krol together!"

"But I cannot come," wheezed Soko, pain in his voice.

A sudden up-blazing of the fire overhead gave them more light, and Hok saw the plight that Soko was in.

Evidently Krol and Soko had fallen upon the branch, Soko underneath. As earlier in the day with Hok and the Stymph, so in this case the lower figure in the impact had been momentarily stunned. Krol, above, had taken that moment to strike downward with the big bone dagger, pouring all his strength into the effort.

That dagger had pierced Soko's body on the left side, coming out beyond and driving deep into the wood of the branch. As Krol himself had put it, Soko was like a beetle on a thorn. "I cannot come," he moaned again, making shift to cling to the branch with both hands, to ease the drag on his wound.

Hok balanced himself on the bough, and began to work his way out toward the unhappy tree-man. There was no nearby branch by which to hold on or to

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share Hok's weight. The single outward shoot swayed and crackled beneath him. He drew back to safer footing.

"I must find another way to him," muttered Hok, tugging his golden beard. Then he thought of such a way, and began to climb upward again.

"Don't leave me," pleaded Soko wretchedly.

"Courage," Hok replied, and searched among branches for what he needed. He found it almost at once—a clumsy mass of vines, strong and pliable as leather thongs. Quickly he cut several of the sturdiest strands, knotting them together. Then he located a stronger branch which extended above the one where Soko was imprisoned. He slid out along it, and made fast one end of his improvised line.

"I am in pain," Soko gasped, his voice weak and trembling.

"Courage!" Hok exhorted him again. He hung axe, bow, quiver and pouch on a stout stub of the base branch. Then he swung down by the knotted vines, descending hand under hand toward Soko.

He came to a point level with the unfortunate prisoner of the wedged dagger, and almost within reach. By shifting his weight he made the cord swing, and was able to hook a knee over the lower bough. Then, holding on by a hand just above a knot in the vines, he put out his other hand to the knife that transfixed Soko.

Even as he touched it, Soko gave a shudder and went limp. He had fainted.

Hok was more glad than otherwise, and forthwith tugged on the tight-stuck weapon with all his strength. It left its lodgment in the wood, and came easily out of Soko's flesh. With nothing to hold him to his lodgment, Soko dropped into emptiness.

HOK made a quick pincer-like clutch with his legs. He caught Soko between his knees, as in a wrestling hold. His single hand hold on the vine was almost stripped away, but he grimly made it support the double weight. The bone dagger he set between his teeth. Then, still holding the senseless Soko by pressure of his knees, he over handed himself upward again. He achieved a seat on the larger branch, and laid Soko securely upon a broad base of several spreading shoots.

Soko bled, but not too profusely. Krol had struck hastily for all his vicious intent, and the knife had pierced the muscles of chest and armpit, just grazing the ribs without hurting a single vital organ. Hok quickly gathered handfuls of leaves, laying them upon the double wound and letting the blood glue them fast for a bandage. In the midst of these ministrations Soko's wide eyes opened again.

"You saved me, Hok," he said in a voice full of trembling gratitude. "That makes twice or three times. Krol—"

"He still lives," rejoined Hok grimly, repossessing himself of his weapons. "Perhaps he steals upon us even now."

Soko's brilliant eyes quested here and there in the night. "I think not," he said. "I have command of myself again. Shall we go upward?"

His wound was troublesome and he climbed stiffly, but he was back to the side of the dying fire well before Hok. "I thirst," he complained.

"Because you have lost blood," Hok told him, and took a fiery stick to light the inside of Krol's abandoned den. Among the great quantity of possessions he saw several gourds. One of these proved to be full of water, warm but good. He gave it to the thankful Soko.

Soko drank, and passed the gourd to Hok. "How can we kill Krol now, my

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friend?" he asked. "Because we must kill him. You understand that."

Hok nodded, drinking in turn. "You shall do it without my help, so as to be chief according to custom. My task will be to destroy Rmanth, and roast him for your people. I made such a promise."

"Promise?" repeated Soko. "Who can keep a promise like that?"

"I have never broken a promise in my life, Soko. Here, help me put out this fire, lest some coals destroy the jungle. And tell me how we shall find Rmanth."

Soko could not do so. His only ventures to the ground had been by way of the vine-spiral tube in which Hok had first found him. He reiterated that Krol, and Krol alone, possessed the courage and knowledge to face Rmanth and come away unhurt.

"Well, then, where do you let down gourds for water?"

"Near the hollow tube. Why?"

"Tomorrow all the tree-dwellers shall have fresh water. That is another of Hok's promises. Will you watch while I sleep, Soko? Later waken me, and sleep yourself."

SOKO agreed, and Hok stretched out wearily upon ferny leafage. He closed his eyes and drifted off into immediate slumber.

Sleeping, he dreamed.

He thought he saw a marshalling of his old enemies. He himself was apparently arrayed singly against a baleful mob. In the forefront was Kimri, the black-bearded giant from whom he had won the lovely Oloana. There was also Cos, a paunchy, nasty-eyed fellow who had ruled the walled town of Tlanis until Hok adventured thither and changed all that. Over the head of Cos looked Romm, who once made the bad guess that renegading among the Gnorrls would give him victory over Hok's Flint Folk. Djoma the Fisher slunk pretty well to the back, for he was never over-enthusiastic about fighting Hok man to man. It was a delightful throng of menaces.*

"I will have the pleasure of slaying you all a second time," Hok greeted them, and rushed. One hand swung his axe, the other jabbed and fenced with a javelin. In his dream, those second killings seemed much easier than had the first. The ancient enemies fell before him like stalks of wild rice before a swamp-buffalo. He mustered the breath in his deep chest to thunder a cry of triumph, when—

They seemed to fade away, and at the same time to mould and compact themselves into yet another form. This one was hairy, pudgy, grizzled, but active. Bestial lips writhed and fluttered, wide eyes that could see in the dark glared.

"So, you big yellow-haired hulk!" choked a voice he knew, beside itself with rage. "I find you unprepared, I kill you *thus!*"

Hok threw himself forward, under the stroke of some half-seen weapon. His hands struck soft flesh, and he heard the threatening words shrill away into a shriek.

Then the dream became reality.

Dawn had come. Soko, wounded and weary, had dozed off during his watch, and Krol had returned to take his vengeance.

Only Hok's sense of danger, shaking him back to wakefulness, had given him the moment of action needed before a blow fell. Krol had poised a big club,

* For fuller accounts of these characters and what happened to them, see "Battle in the Dawn," January '39 Amazing Stories; "Hok Goes to Atlantis," December '39, Amazing Stories; "Hok Draws the Bow," May '40, Amazing Stories; "Hok and the Gift of Heaven," March '41, Amazing Stories.—Ed.

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a piece of thorn-wood stout enough to break the skull of a horse. This weapon now swished emptily in air, as Hok grappled and held helpless the gray old sinner.

"Soko! Soko!" called Hok loudly.

Soko loooked up, washing the sleep from his own eyes. "Eh?" he yawned, then he too was aware of the danger. He sprang up.

"Soko," said Hok, "I swore that you would kill this man and become chieftain in his place. Do so now. Do not let him escape once more."

Soko drew a dagger. Hok let go of Krol.

THE deposed ruler of the tree-men made a last effort to break for safety, but Hok blocked his retreat. Then Soko caught Krol by his long hair. The dagger he held—it was the same big bone blade that had spiked Soko to the branch last night—darted into the center of Krol's chest. Blood bubbled out. The old despot collapsed, dying.

The wakening tree-people were hurrying from all sides to stare and question. Hok clapped Soko's unwounded shoulder.

"Obey your new chief," he urged the gathering. "Be afraid of him, follow him, respect him. He is your leader and your father."

Krol looked up, blood on his wide mouth. "What about the water?" he sneered, and with a coughing gobble he died.

There was silence, and Soko, in the first moment of his power, could only look to Hok for guidance.

"People of the trees," said Hok, "I have been challenged. Krol was bad and deserved death. But he spoke the truth when he reminded us that water was not at hand while Rmanth roamed below. In other words, Rmanth must be destroyed. I promised that, did I not?" He balanced his axe in one hand, and nodded to Soko. "Come chief. We will arrange the matter."

Soko followed him, trying not to seem too laggardly. Hok raised his voice: "Go to the usual place, you others, and let down your gourds. Water shall be yours, now and forever after."

He and Soko came to the tube that gave sheltered descent to the ground level. Hok entered it first, swinging downward by the rough ladder-rungs. Soko for once did not climb faster than he. Hok came to the floor of the cavity, and without hesitation wriggled through the lower opening into the outer air, standing upon the damp earth of the valley bottom. Soko had to be called twice before he followed.

"Look around for that stream of water," directed Hok. "There, isn't that it, showing through the stems below us? Come on, Soko. You are chief now."

At that word, Soko drew himself up. "Yes, I am a chief," he said sturdily. "I will do what a chief should do, even though Rmanth eats me."

"You shall eat Rmanth instead," Hok said confidently. "But first, the water."

They came to the edge of the stream. Gourds dangled down from above, on lengthy vine strings. Hok and Soko guided them into the water, and tugged for them to be drawn up. Glad cries beat down from the upper branches, as the hoisters felt the comforting weight of the containers.

"The voices will bring Rmanth," Soko said dully.

Hok glanced over his shoulder. "He is already here. Leave him to me. Go on and fill gourds."

He turned from Soko and walked back among the trees, toward the gray bulk with its six knobby horns and

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hungry tusks.

"I have a feeling that this was planned for both of us," Hok addressed the elephant-pig. "Come then. We will race, play and fight, and it shall end when one of us is dead."

CHAPTER XI

The Termination of Rmanth

SEVERAL accounts have descended to us of how Hok raced, played and fought that day.* But names have been changed, some facts have been altered for the sake of ritual or romance. In any case, Hok himself talked little about the business, for such was not his way. The only narrators were the tree-folk, who did not see much of what happened. Which makes the present story valuable as new light on an old, old truth.

Hok saw that Rmanth was at least six times more angry than when they had met last. The arrow in his tongue had evidently broken off or worked its way out, though pink-tinted foam flecked Rmanth's great protruding tusks. The arrow in his nostril still remained, and his ugly snout was swollen and sore. His eyes remained cold and cunning, but as Hok came near they lighted with a pale glow of recognition.

"You know me, then," Hok said. "What have we to say and do to each other?"

Rmanth replied by action, a bolting direct charge.

Tree-thickets sprouted between the two, but Rmanth clove and ploughed among them like a bull among reeds. His explosion into attack was so sudden, so unwarned, so swift, that Hok's sideward leap saved him barely in time. As it was, the bristly flank of the beast touched him lightly as it drove by. Rmanth, missing that first opportunity to finish this maddening enemy, turned as nimbly as a wild horse, head wrenched around on the huge shoulders and horrid fangs gaping for a crushing bite.

Hok hurriedly conquered an instinctive urge to spring clear—such a spring would only have mixed him up in the brush, and Rmanth's second pounce would have captured him. The part of wisdom was to come close, and Hok did so. He placed one hand against Rmanth's great quivering haunch, the other hand grasping his bow-stave. As the big brute spun to snap at him, Hok followed the haunches around. Rmanth could not get quite close enough to seize him. As the two of them circled, Hok saw a way into the open, and took it at once. He slipped around and behind a big tree. Rmanth, charging violently after, smote that tree heavily. Hok laughed, then headed toward the slope which he had traveled the day before.

Rmanth's thick head must have buzzed from that impact against the tree. He stood swaying his muzzle experimentally, planting his forefeet widely. Hok had done all his maneuverings with an arrow laid ready across his bow, held in place with his left fore-

* The myth that will rise quickest to the reader's memory is the one concerning Hercules and his conquest of the mighty wild boar of Eurymanthis. It is odd, or not so odd, that Greek myths tell the same story in several forms. Thus Theseus, who may be another memory of Hercules or Hok, destroys such a giant swine in his youthful journey to his father's court. Meleager hunts and kills the Calydonian boar. And one of the Tuscan heroes of Latin Legend, named in "The Lays of Ancient Rome" as an adversary of Horatius, won his fame by killing a boar "that wasted fields and slaughtered men."

Such super-swine are described as unthinkably huge and strong, clumsy but swift, with fierce and voracious natures that made them a menace to whole communities and districts. Not even the European wild boar, wicked fighter though it is, could approximate such character and performance. It becomes increasingly sure that Rmanth, the boar of Eurymanthis, and those others, trace back to tales of the now extinct Dinoceras.—Ed.

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finger. Now he had time to draw it fully and send it singing at Rmanth's face.

As before, he aimed at the eye. This time his aim was not spoiled. The shaft drove deep into one cold, wicked orb, and Rmanth rose suddenly to his massive hind-quarters, an upright colossus, pawing the air and voicing a horrible cry of pain. Such a cry has been imagined only once by modern man, and the imaginer was both a scholar and a master of fantasy.* Hok clinched forever his right to his reputation of stout-heartedness. He laughed a second time.

"An arrow in your other eye, and you'll be at my mercy!" said he, reaching over his shoulder for another shaft in his quiver.

But there was not another shaft in his quiver.

THE battlings with the Stymphs, his knocking of the milknut from an assailant's hand, the hurried destruction of Krol's gaudy snake had used up his store of shafts. If Rmanth was half-blinded, Hok was wholly without missiles. He felt a cold wave of dismay for a moment, but only for a moment.

"Perhaps I was not fair to think of hacking and prodding a helpless enemy to death," he reflected. "This makes a more even battle of it. At any rate, Rmanth has forgotten that Soko will be filling the water gourds. Let me play with him further. Here he comes!"

And here he came, in another of his mighty bursts of power, swift and resistless as an updriving avalanche.

Hok dared wait longer this time, for Rmanth must charge up the hill. He had quickly returned his bow to its shoulder loop, and now took a stout grip on his axe. As the gaping fang-fringed maw, from which lolled that inflamed tongue, was almost upon him, he sprang aside as before and chopped at the remaining good eye of Rmanth. Missing, he struck the gray hide of the cheek. His heavy flint rebounded like a hailstone from a hut-roof. Hok turned and ran, leaping from side to side to confuse his enemy, and paused near the great sloping trail down which dying mammoths were wont to slide themselves. A carrion stench assailed his nostrils, and he remembered his original quarrel with Rmanth.

"You ate my prey," he accused the lumbering hulk, which turned stubbornly to pursue him further. "Gragru I trapped, wounded, and chased. He was mine. He recognied my victory. But you lolled below here and gorged yourself on my hunting. You owe me meat, Rmanth, and I intend to collect the debt."

His voice, as usual, maddened the elephant-pig. When Hok began to scale the slope backward, Rmanth breasted the climb with great driving digs of his massive feet and legs.

But now the advantage was with Hok. Lighter, neater-footed, he could move faster on the assent than could this mighty murderer. Indeed, he could probably gain the snow-lipped plain above and escape entirely. But he did not forget his promise to Soko's people. Victory, not flight, was what he must achieve.

"Come near, Rmanth," he invited, moving backward and upward. "I want a fair chance at you."

Rmanth complied, surging up the slanting trail with a sudden new muster of energy. Hok braced himself and smote with his axe at Rmanth's nose.

*. . . something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle . . . and when you've once heard it you'll be *quite* content." —Lewis Carroll, in THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS.—Ed.

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Right between the two forward horns his blade struck, and again Rmanth yelled in furious pain. But the blow only bruised that heavy hide, did not lay it fully open. Rmanth faltered, and Hok retreated once more.

"This nightmare cannot be wounded," he reflected aloud. "At least not in the side or head or muzzle, like an honest beast. What then? The neck, as with a bull?"*

But there was no way to get to Rmanth's neck. He did not charge with head down, like a stag or bison or rhinoceros, but with nose up and mouth open, like a beast of prey. Hok wished that he had a spear, stout and long. It might serve his turn. But he had only the axe, and it must not fail him. He continued his retirement, along the trail he remembered from his previous descent.

SO FOR some time, and for considerable rise in altitude. Then, suddenly, Rmanth was not crowding Hok any longer. Hok paused and grimaced his defiance.

"Tired?" he jeered. "Or afraid?"

Plainly it was the latter, but Rmanth's fear was not for Hok. He turned his one good eye this way and that, looking up into the sky that at this point was not very misty. He sniffed, and wrinkled a very ugly gray lip that reminded Hok of Krol.

Then Hok remembered. "Oh, yes, the Stymphs. Krol told me that you did not venture far enough from the shelter of the trees for them to reach you. But think no more about them, Rmanth. I killed most of them. Those who lived have flown away. Perhaps the snow will destroy them—they seem to think it a kinder neighbor than Hok."

He moved boldly into an open space on the slope. Rmanth snorted and wheezed, seeming to wait for sure doom to overtake the audacious human. Then he squinted skyward again, was plainly reassured, and finally followed Hok upward.

"Well done, elephant-pig!" Hok applauded. "This is between you and me. No Stymph will cheat the conqueror."

More ascent, man and beast toiling into less tropical belts. Hok found himself backing into a ferny thicket. It was here that—yes, wadded into a fork was his bundle of winter clothing.

As he found it, it seemed that he found also a plan, left here like the clothes against his need. He felt like shouting out one of his laughs, but smothered it lest Rmanth be placed on guard. Instead he seized and shook out the big lion skin that was his main protection against blizzards. Its shaggy expanse was blond and bright, like his own hair.

"See, Rmanth," he roared, "I run no more! Catch this!"

He flung the pelt right into Rmanth's face.

Next moment those mighty fangs had closed upon the fur. The horrid head bore its prize to earth, holding it there as if to worry it. His neck was stooped, the thick skin stretched taut. . . . Hok hurled himself forward in a charge.

Before Rmanth was aware that the hide in his jaws was empty, Hok had sprung and planted a moccasin upon

* The sturdiest of animals can be dealt with by attacking the spine through the nape of the neck. Most familiar of such attacks is probably the sword-thrust of the matador in a Spanish bull-fight. The bull is induced to lower his head, bringing into reach a vulnerable spot the size of one's open palm at juncture of neck and shoulders. Elephant and rhinoceros also can be killed by a proper stab there, since the spinal cord is close to the surface, for all the thick, hard hide. Scientists think that the down-pointing front teeth of the sabre-tooth tiger—extinct, or very rare, in Hok's time—were designed by nature for just such a mode of killing.—Ed.

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his nose, between those forward horns. Rmanth emitted a whistling grunt and tossed upward, as a bull tosses. Hok felt himself flipped into the air, and for a moment he soared over the neck-nape, the very position he hoped for.

Down slammed his axe, even as he hurtled. It struck hard, square, and true across the spine of Rmanth, back of the shallow skull. Hok's arms tingled with the back-snap of that effort, and his body was flung sidewise by it.

But Rmanth was down, stunned or smashed. He floundered to his knees. Hok ran to him, dagger out. A thrust, a powerful dragging slash, and the thick hide was torn open. Once more the axe rose and fell. The exposed spinal vertebrae broke beneath the impact with a sound like a tree splitting on a frosty night.

Rmanth relaxed, and abruptly rolled down slope, as dead mammoths were wont to roll. Hok saved his last breath, forbearing to shout his usual signal of victory. Snatching up his crumpled lion-skin cloak, he dashed swiftly downward in pursuit of that big lump of flesh he had killed.

CHAPTER XII

The Feast and the Farewell

THOSE men, women and children who had been Soko's tree-people sat at last on the solid soil, stockaded about with the mighty trees of the jungle, and roofed over with the impenetrable mat of foliage, vines and mould that had once been their floor and footing. They sat in a circle near the brink of the stream, and in the circle's center was a cheerful cooking-fire of Hok's making. The air was heavy with the smell of roast meat.

There had been enough of Rmanth for all, and more than enough. Once Hok had found Soko and shown him the carcass, it had been possible, though not easy, to coax the other men down to ground level. And it had taken all the muscle of the tribe, tugging wearily on tough vine-strands, to drag Rmanth to the waterside. After that, it was an additional labor, with much blunting of bone knives, to flay away his great armor of hide. But when the great wealth of red meat was exposed, and Hok had instructed the most apt of the tribe in the cooking thereof—ah, after that it was a fulfillment of the most ancient dreams about paradise and plenty.

Three or four tribesmen were toasting last delectable morsels on green twigs in the outlying beds of coals. More of them lolled and even slept in heavy surfeit, assured that no great trampling foe would overtake and destroy them. The children, who no amount of gorging could quiet down, were skipping and chattering in the immemorial game of tag. To one side sat Soko, on a boulder that was caught between gnarled roots, and his pose was that of a benevolent ruler.

A comely young woman of his people was applying a fresh dressing of astringent herbs and leaves to the wound Krol had made the night before. Grandly Soko affected not to notice the twinges of pain or the attractions of the attendant. He spoke with becoming gravity to Hok, who lounged near with his back against a tree, his big flint axe cuddled crosswise on his lap.

"There is much more meat than my people will ever finish," Soko observed.

"Build fires of green wood, that will make thick smoke," Hok directed. "In that smoke hang thin slices of the meat that is left. It will be dried and preserved so as to keep for a long time, and make other meals for your tribe."

Soko eyed Hok's bow, which leaned

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against the tree beside him. "That dart-caster of yours is a wonderful weapon," he observed. "I have drawn two shafts, still good, from Rmanth's body. If I can make a bow like it—"

"Take this one," said Hok generously, and passed it over. "I have many more, as good or better, in my own home village. Study the kind of wood used, how it is shaped and rigged, and copy it carefully. Your men can hunt more meat. A jungle like this must have deer and pig and perhaps cattle. Since your people have tasted roasted flesh, they will want more on which to increase their strength."

"We will keep coals from that cooking fire," said Soko.

"Do more than that," Hok urged. "You have seen my fire-sticks and how I used them. Make some for yourself, that the fire may be brought to you when you need it." He peered around him. "See, Soko, there are outcroppings of hard rock near and far. I see granite, a bit of jasper, and here and there good flints. Use those to make tools and weapons instead of bone or ivory."

THE dressing of Soko's wound was completed. Soko dismissed the young woman with a lordly gesture, but watched her appreciatively as she demurely departed. Then he turned back to his guest. His smile took from his face the strange beast-look that clung to the wide loose lips and chinless jaw.

"Hok," he said, "we shall never forget these wonders you have done for us, and which you have taught us to do for ourselves. In future times, when you deign to come again—"

"But I shall not come again," Hok told him.

Soko looked surprised and hurt. Hok continued:

"You and I are friends, Soko. It is our nature to be friendly, unless someone proves himself an enemy. But your people and my people are too different. There would be arguments and difficulties between them, and then fights and trouble. When I leave here, it will be forever. I shall not tell at once what I have seen. What I tell later will be only part of the truth. Because I think you and your kind will be better off untroubled and unknown in this valley."

Soko nodded slowly, his eyes thoughtful. "I had been counting on your help from time to time," he confessed. "Perhaps experience will help me, though. What shall we do here after you are gone?"

"Be full of mystery," said Hok sententiously. "The Stymphs seem to have flown away, but their reputation will linger over your home. I judge that game does not prowl near, and only the mammoth knows the valley—to dive into it and die. If ever a hunter of my sort comes near, it will be the veriest accident.

"Thus you will have the chance to make your people strong and wise. They have regained the full right to walk on the ground and breathe air under open skies, which right was denied by Krol. In times to come, I venture to say, you shall issue forth as a race to be great in the outer world. Meanwhile, stay secret. Your secrecy is safe with me." *

He rose, and so did Soko. They shook hands.

"You depart now, at only the beginning of things?" Soko suggested.

"The adventure and the battle, at least, are at an end," Hok reminded him. "I am tormented by a sickness of the mind, Soko, which some call

* Again referring to the Greek myths, there is the tale of how Hercules came close to the Garden of the Hesperides, a fruitful paradise guarded by dragons. Now we know the source of that story.—Ed.

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curiosity. It feeds on strife, travel and adventure. And so I go home to the northward, to find if my people do not know of such things to comfort me. Goodbye, Soko. I wish you joy of your Ancient Land."

He picked up his furs and his axe, and strode away toward the trail up the slope. Behind him he heard Soko's people lifting a happy noise that was probably their method of singing.

THE END.

« ODDITIES OF SCIENCE »

UNDER ONE COVER

THE latest edition of Webster's New International dictionary contains 600,000 entries, has 12,000 illustrations, 35,000 geographical references, 13,000 biographical, contains 3,350 pages and costs over a million and a quarter dollars to compile. It took Webster's word specialists eight years to turn out their latest second edition. They needed the help of two hundred and seven other authorities who were called in to give their experience and knowledge in their particular fields. Take the word "goon" for example: it won't be included in Webster's dictionary until it has been properly defined by labor experts. The same applies to words like "fink," "Quisling," and "fifth columnist." These words must be defined by experts who use them.

Contrary to popular belief, usage determines what words get into the dictionary. Many moss-backed English teachers insist that a word isn't correct unless the dictionary says so. Well, then take the word "ain't". At one time you were considered something of an illiterate wag if you used that word. Now, though considered improper, it is used by the best of us and is far from vulgar.

Dictionaries are built much in the same manner as a brick wall is put together, brick by brick. Noah Webster's first modest dictionary contained but 38,000 words. The first printing was in 1806. A larger volume of 70,000 words was published in 1828.

In the old-time 1828 dictionary good old Noah Webster had the habit of going into lengthy dissertations as to the moral implication of the word mentioned. In mentioning the word "sin" he would go into a long harangue as to what terrors face those who commit a sin and how surely their souls will go straight to hades, now more commonly called hell.

PECULIAR MENTAL STOCK

IT IS said that dictators and emperors are of a peculiar mental stock—a stock that is chock full of idiosyncrasies. Take for example, Heliogabalus, the extravagant Roman emperor, who had an addiction for feasting on the tongues of peacocks and nightingales and the brains of parrots and pheasants. History records that at one banquet he served, in a single dish, the brains of 600 ostriches.

NOT SO MODERN!

CHECK appendicitis off your list of modern diseases based on the "rigors" of civilization Experts recently examining several ancient Egyptian mummies discovered that the deceased were victims of the malady.

TRUTH ABOUT BATS

THIS being a magazine of fantasy and sometimes one of somewhat weird tales, it's only natural that once in a while our writers portray bats as the most awful of sinister creatures. Yet how different from the truth!

During the last 15 years students, cooperating with the United States Biological Survey, have been doing a lot to prove that bats spend most of their life doing other things than getting in people's hair. By catching bats, tagging them with aluminum leg bands and numbers, then setting them free, students have been able to learn a thing or two. Don Griffin, a Harvard student of two years ago, banded some 10,000 bats, and to study their habits he has invaded everything from abandoned mine shafts and mountain caves to the hot hay mows of old barns. The results clearly show that many of our ideas about bats are really pure hokum.

It has been discovered that some bats winter in Bermuda and summer in New England; others hibernate in caves. Most of them possess much the same homing instinct as pigeons. The female carry their young beneath their wings, the infants hanging tenaciously onto the maternal fur. And when you see bats swooping about at night, they are not hell bent on getting a good parking place in someone's hair, but are hunting insects with amazing expertness. Life being what it is these days, the comment of a well-known naturalist seems appropriate: "Bats probably think we're *bats!*"

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Time Wounds

"Not only does the door open; it falls off when I touch it!"

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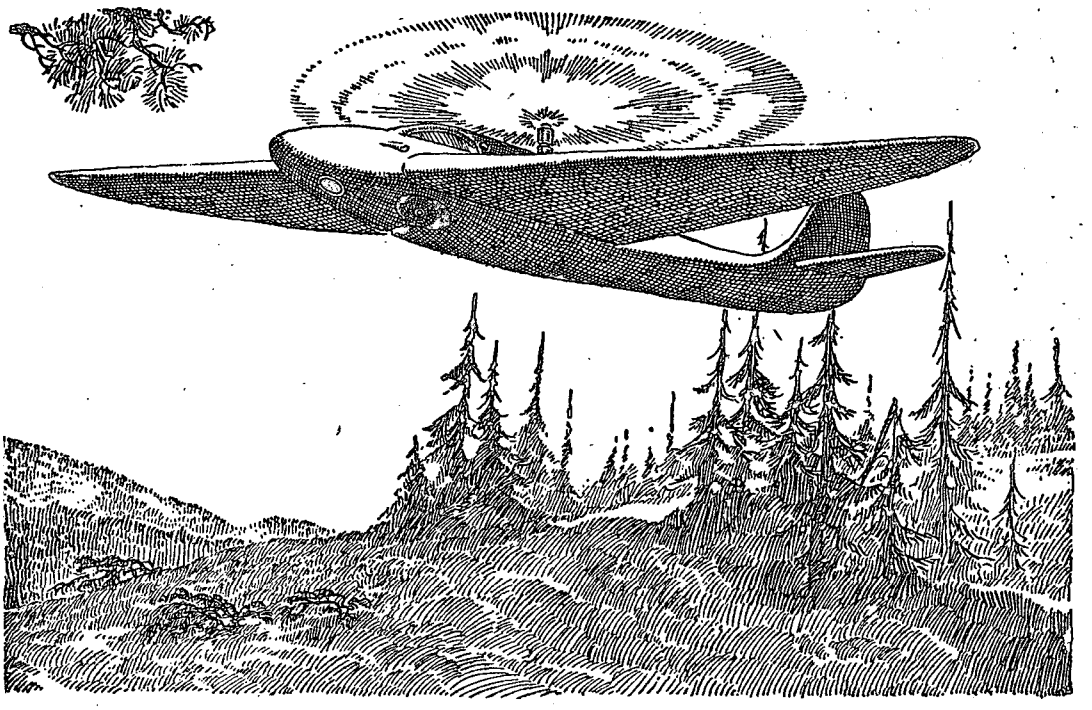
All Heels

By Robert Bloch



Jeep had a reputation for being a liar, but there was something about his story that was convincing; and besides there was his appetite—and those pills!

I DROPPED into Jack's place the other night for a slice of tongue—some of it in a sandwich and some from between Jack's lips. The place was pretty crowded, but I managed to find a booth as Jack glided over to take my order.

"What'll it be?" he asked. Then—"Well I'll be damned!" said Jack.

"Probably," I observed.

But Jack didn't hear me. He was staring at the tall thin man who elbowed his way toward the booth.

I stared, too. There was nothing remarkable about the gentleman's thin, somewhat dour face, but his suit was enough to attract anyone's attention. It isn't often that you see a horse-blanket walking.

"See that guy?" Jack whispered, hurriedly. "He's a number for you. Used to be an upper bracket in the rackets."

"He looks it," I confided. "Is he dangerous?"

"No. Reformed, completely reformed. Ever since he divorced his third wife he's led a simple life, playing the races. But I never expected to see him in here—he hasn't been around for months. Wait—I'll see if I can steer him into your booth. You'll enjoy it—he's the biggest liar in seven states."

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"What seven?" I asked, in some curiosity. But Jack was signalling the glum-faced man in the checkered suit.

"Hello, Lefty! Where in blazes have you been?"

"Everywhere, and up to my neck," said the stranger. "But make with the menu because at the moment I arrive by express from hunger."

"Sit here," Jack suggested, indicating my booth. This guy is a friend of mine."

Lefty favored me with a long look.

"Is he a righto or a wrongo?" he asked.

"He's a writer," said Jack. "Bob, I want you to meet a friend of mine—Lefty Feep."

"A pleasure," I said.

Lefty sat down without a word and grabbed the menu from Jack's hands.

"Shoot the steak to me Jack," he said. "Also I will have bean soup, clam chowder, a double order mashed potatoes, peas, carrots, roast chicken, a ham on rye, baked beans, an order of waffles, asparagus, pork tenderloin, scrambled eggs, coffee, apple pie, ice cream, and watermelon."

"You kidding?"

"No—eating. Now bring it here, but fast. My stomach is empty so long I think it's haunted."

Jack shrugged and moved away, muttering the incredible order under his breath.

Lefty Feep turned to me suddenly with a scowl.

"Vitamins!" he grated. "Vitamins!"

"You need them?" I asked.

"I hate vitamins," said Lefty. "Give me food any time."

"What's the matter, been on a diet?"

"You speak a mean truth, all right. For a week now I partake of nothing but vitamins. I am going pill-wacky." Lefty sighed heavily. "B'-bugs," he mumbled. "D-dizzy."

"Doctor's orders?" I inquired.

"No. Restaurant orders. It's all I can get. Will you live in a burg where nobody nibbles anything but pills?"

"What town is this you're speaking of?"

"New York."

"But there's plenty of food in New York—" I began.

"There is and there isn't," said Lefty, darkly brooding. "There is now but there will be ain't."

"I don't get it."

"I figure you don't. Nobody will. I can make with the explanations but it is not such a thing as anyone will believe and I do not wish to get the reputation of a guy who sniffs snow."

"You're no drug addict," I said. "Come on, spill it."

Lefty Feep looked at me again with a wry smile. He shrugged.

"You asked for it," he said. "It is a story that will make your hair curdle and your blood stand on end."

"Shoot," I urged.

He shot.

* * *

"LAST week I am coming back from Buffalo where I wager a few pennies on the bow-wows. My pooch comes in and I make collections, so I drive back very happy. It is the first time I make money by going to the dogs."

"More and over, I know I have five rancho grandos waiting for me in Manhattan, where I place another bet with a personality name of Gorilla Gabface.

"This Gorilla Gabface is a number I dearly love to hate. He is a big noise in the rackets, and I do not care to have dealings with such riff and raff. Our association is just sentimental, because he and I once work our way through reform school together selling

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alky.

"But while I get reformed, Gorilla merely gets more and more unscrupulous in his business deals, until he is left with not one single scruple at all. I do all right, but he is always poking from fun at me, saying the only gold I will ever see will be in a halo, while he has enough gold for a complete set of teeth.

"So I am very hepped over winning this little wager, like I say, and I start driving back thinking about how I will hand him the old razz and he will hand me the old cash and it will be a very fair exchange.

"Along about noon a.m. I find myself in the mountain country, and I am so happy I start to yodel while I drive. In fact, I even open the car window a rifle to sniff some air, which is unusual for me, because I have a theory that air is not so healthy on guys if it is too fresh.

"But the hills are very pretty, and the road has more curves than a Minsky stripper, and the sun is shining, and the birds are singing, and it is just one great big popular song if you know what I mean. I feel like a character on the Alka-Seltzer Barn Dance.

"I am too happy to notice where I'm going, so it is no wonder at all that I snap out of it to find myself off on a side road going up a hill.

"I figure on turning around when I reach the top, so I keep driving up and over. But the hill does not seem to have any top to it—I just keep on twisting and turning, and all the time the road is getting dustier and smaller, and the woods on each side are as thick as a House of David beard.

"It is so uncivilized I do not even spot a gas station. For that matter, I no longer see any farm houses or catalogue cabins. I wonder about this more than slightly, but keep on driving. The air is blue up there, and so am I, because I figure I am lost for sure unless I get a chance to turn around.

"THEN all at once I come to a level grade that goes off for quite a space into a little valley between the hills. I am just ready to wheel around when I notice the sign.

"It is on the side of the road just ahead, standing on a stick between some rocks. I am curious to see what kind of advertising goes over here in the provinces, so I pull up and read it. It says:

PICNIC TODAY
DIMINUTIVE SOCIETY OF
THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS

FREE ENTERTAINMENT AND
REFRESHMENTS.
STRANGERS WELCOME

"I suddenly realize I am panging from hunger, not having taken in groceries yet today. And here is free refreshments, so what can I lose? I never hear of the Diminutive Society of the Catskill Mountains before, but I figure they never hear of me either, so it's even.

"Before you can say Jack Dempsey, I make up my mind to drive on in, which I do. The road is just a little trail now, but I can make it if I go slow between the rocks.

"All at once I look up at the sky, because I hear thunder. The sky is still blue, and the sun is shining, so I figure I make a mistake. But no, I get a little further, and the thunder is louder.

"Then I round the last bend in the road and come out on an open space, and I see what is making with the thunder. There is an outdoor bowling alley, so help me, and the noise is from

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the balls rolling along the rocks.

"But that is not what makes me turn off the ignition and sit there like somebody stuffed a watermelon in my mouth. I am staring at the bowlers.

"Now I am a personality who gets around considerable for many's the year. I have the pleasure of placing my peepers on a lot of screwy spectacles, including pink elephants. But never do I see a wormier looking sight than this.

"Because the bowlers at this picnic are a bunch of dwarfs. So help me, there are a couple dozen of them, little shorty guys in nightcaps and ski suits, all running around like fugitives from Walt Disney.

"This baffles me but plenty. Because the sign says this is a picnic for the Diminutive Society, and instead of seeing Diminutives, there are these dwarfs.

"FINALLY I figure it is some kind of circus brawl or publicity stunt, though I don't notice any Pathe newsreel cameras. What I do notice is the nice collection of beer kegs off on one side.

"I sit there and watch the pint-size Hank Marinos knock off the tenpins for some minutes. And then, all of a sudden, I hear a scratching at the side of the car. 'Aha, termites!' I say to myself.

"But when I open the door I do not see any termite. Instead, the smallest guy in the world is standing on the running board, trying to reach the door handle.

"He has a long gray beard on his face and a short beer in his hand. 'Welcome, stranger,' he pipes up, in no voice at all. 'Welcome to the Diminutive Society of the Catskills.' I do not altogether understand this, but what he says next shows me his heart is in the right place. 'Have a drink,' he says.

"So I climb out and take the mug from him. The beer is plenty good, and has more kick than a chorus girl with her costume on fire. 'Little man, what now?' I ask.

"He grins through his chin-spinach. 'What gives out here?' I inquire. 'Make with the explanations.'

"He shrugs. 'We do, not entertain visitors very often, I fear,' he pipes. 'I fear I fail to comprehend your meaning.'

"By this time a whole crowd of shorty guys are standing around watching and poking each other. I begin to feel like I was back in school the time I was 16 and in the Third Grade. Most of these babies couldn't pick my pocket without using a stepladder.

"So I turn around to the head squeaker again and try to make him understand, because I can see from what he says that he can't be any too bright.

"'Listen, quaint-face,' I say, politely. 'Where's Snow-White?'

"This does not go over. Evidently these jerks cannot even understand English.

"'I mean, what's the score? Which one of you is Dopey? What is this—a convention of Midget Auto Racers?'

"The head little guy smiles again. 'You don't seem to understand at all,' he tells me. 'This is the annual picnic of the Diminutive Society of the Catskill Mountains. It is the one occasion each year when we venture forth from our homes to celebrate our ownership of these hills. We bowl, we drink, we make merry from sunup to sundown. It has been a long time, as I say, since the last stranger's arrival. May we welcome you?'

"I don't get it at all. There is something awfully queer about this whole

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setup. The way these little guys dress, and talk, and giggle. But what have I got to lose? They are too small to hurt me, and I don't see any equalizers in the mob. They are kind of drunk and out for a good time so why shouldn't I stick around for a few drinks and a few laughs? Maybe it is the mountain air that does it, or maybe it is the first beer on an empty stomach. Anyhow, I shake hands with the head midget and say, 'Thanks, Shorty. How's for a little bowling?'

"SO then it begins. I take a turn at the alleys and I take a turn at the beers. These small fry have special bowling balls made up to fit their hands —about the size of tennis balls and not much heavier. I fling them two at a time, to be fair.

"These small fry also have special beer mugs made up to fit their mouths. So I drink three or four at a time, also to be fair.

"Pretty soon I turn out to be not only fair but also quite stinkaroo. These local yokels brew a mean beer, and before I notice it I am quite dizzy. The dwarfs do not seem to notice, either, but keep right on setting up the pins and the drinks, and I keep right on knocking them down.

"I am a nasty hand at the old strike-and-spare, even though the ground is rough, and they stand around cheering me on while I polish off one bowler after another, also one beer after another.

"Perhaps I am telling this kind of confused—but that's the way I get, all right.

"It only seems like minutes, but it must be hours, when I glance over my shoulder and see the old sun is going down. I have killed the whole afternoon at this picnic.

"The dwarfs also seem to keep track of the time, because all of a sudden they quiet down and get ready to take a last drink. Nothing will do but for me to drink with them. And on account of there being two dozen of them, I have a lot of drinking to do.

"The head shorty keeps staring at me and nudging his pals while he watches me inhale the brew. 'Verily, he has a greater capacity than Master Van Winkle,' he giggles.

"The name seems to penetrate the speckled fog in my noggin for a minute. 'What's this about Van Winkle?' I ask.

"But the sun is very low and red, and it is dark all around, and I see the dwarfs suddenly start running across the bowling lawn and into the shadows. The head shorty runs after them. 'We must leave you, stranger,' he calls over his shoulder. 'Pleasant dreams.'

"I start to run after him, but all at once I stumble on the grass and everything starts going round and round—ten little red suns juggle themselves in my head, and the ground comes up and I am out.

"Just before I close my eyes I manage to holler after the last little runt again. 'Who is this Van Winkle?' I gasp.

"I can not be sure, because I am going down for the third time, but I think I hear his voice come from far away. 'Why, Master Rip Van Winkle, of course,' whispers the dwarf.

"I open my mouth to say something, but the only thing coming out is a snore.

"WHEN I open my beautiful baby blue eyes again, it is daylight. At first I do not remember where I am, but then it all comes back in a hurry and I realize I pass out and probably sleep the night here.

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"I raise up on one elbow to see if my little friends are around, but there are no signs. In fact, to make it funny, there is not even any bowling lawn, or tenpins, or tennis-size bowling balls. To make it not so funny, there is no beer keg, either—and I have a thirst, but strong.

"Maybe it is all a dream, I figure. Then I turn my head and I begin to pray it is a dream.

"Because I am now staring at the car, parked off to one side. And what I see is not altogether a sight for sore eyes like mine.

"Yesterday I leave a nice new coupe standing there. Today I find a jallopy you couldn't trade in on a pair of roller skates. It is covered with rust an inch thick; the tires are down, and the windows are out.

"I get up in a hurry because it is all clear to me now. These dwarfs I drink with are nothing but a gang of car thieves. They slip me a Mickey Finn and steal my coupe, leaving me this broken down wheelbarrow just to be quaint. No wonder they treat me so well—they are nothing but a bunch of Dead End Kids in whiskers!

"I run over to the wreck and wrench open the door. It not only opens but comes off in my hand.

"Then I reach inside, and all at once something flies out and hits me in the face. A couple of bats—so help me!

"I stare down at the cobwebs on the seat. Then I go around in front and stare again. This time I nearly fall down.

"Because I see my license plates on this jallopy!

"There is something wrong here. This is my car, all right—but . . . But? I reach up to scratch my chin. My hand never gets there. It tangles up in something soft, like a fur coat.

"My hand is tangled in a beard. A white beard. *My* beard! At least it is growing on me, so it must be my beard, though I do not want such a thing. No, I do not want such a thing as this beard at all, because it is all tangled up with burrs and thistles.

"I look down at my clothes and that is the last straw. You could even say that is the last shred. Because there isn't much left of my clothes except shreds. My trousers have got French cuffs made of rags. The moths have been holding a convention on my knees. My coat and vest look like something a goat would eat for dessert.

"I AM not sitting in the hot seat at the moment, but I am still plenty shocked.

"Here I am, lost in the mountains, with an old car and a new beard. It is enough to make a guy holler—so I do. I kind of lose my head and run around yelling for the dwarfs to come out and make with the explanations. I guess I am off the beam for several moments, just screeching there, when I hear a sound.

"It is a buzzing sound, and it gets louder. All at once I look up and see a plane. The plane circles around, comes lower, and taxis down right in the open space where the bowling green should be.

"I just gawk. It is a new model plane, very small; all silvery and shining. What makes me gawk is the fact that it lands in just about a minute, and it only taxis maybe a hundred feet.

"I do not have much time to gawk, because a guy climbs out of the door and steps over to me. 'Anything wrong?' he asks me.

"'Yeah,' I reply. 'You are.' And he is.

"He is wearing a pretty funny getup himself—a pair of overalls with long sleeves and lapels on top. Instead of a

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hat he has a kind of basin on his head that looks like a helmet with antennae sticking up.

" 'Who are you?' I say, kind of sad. 'And if you tell me you're Flash Gordon, you can lock me up.'

"He just grins. 'My name is Grant,' he says. 'Special investigator for the government. What might your name be?'

" 'It might be Old Man Mose, from the looks of things,' I tell him. 'But it isn't. I'm on my way to New York, but I run into a little difficulty.'

" 'You mean to say an old man like you intends to walk all the way to New York?' he says. 'No wonder you are yelling. Would you like a lift?—I'll be hitting New York in about half an hour.'

" 'I'm with you, brother,' I say. So we hop in the plane. I do not look back at the car again, and for some reason I do not wish to look down at myself, either. Still and all I have to make a crack. 'Who are you calling an old man?' I yap.

"He grins again. 'Why you, of course. You're every bit of 60, aren't you? And with a beard, too—I haven't seen one of those things in years.'

"This shuts me up as we take off. 'You are quite a hot sketch yourself,' I tell him. 'What are you doing with that thundermug on your head?'

"Grant looks at me like I am stir-simple. 'Why that's the radio control helmet for the plane, of course. Don't you know planes are operated by radio adjustment?' he asks, turning the antennae on top of the basin and making the plane rise. 'Say, how far in the backwoods do you come from?'

" 'Brother, I wish I knew,' I answer.

" 'You know, there's something funny about you,' he goes on. 'Those clothes you're wearing—they aren't exactly 1962 cut.'

" '1962?' I yell.

"Grant gives me a long look. 'Of course. Don't tell me you don't know what date it is?'

" 'Why, April 30th, 1942,' I snap back.

"HE BEGINS to laugh. Somehow I do not like to hear him laugh because I am not on the Bob Hope program at the time. 'This is April 28th, 1962,' he tells me. 'You are just 20 years and 363 days off. Or maybe you're further off than that.'

" 'I think so myself,' I say. 'Because I lay me down to sleep just last night, and if it is not 1942 at the time, I am robbed when I buy a newspaper.'

" 'Are you kidding me?' asks this Grant.

" 'Somebody is kidding somebody,' I tell him. 'All I know is I hoist a few beers with a gang of dwarfs on a picnic and fall asleep. When I wake up my car is rusty, my suit is a ragpicker's delight, and I have long white whiskers. Which is hard to figure out, because I am really a young guy with a sporty car and a nifty checkered suit. And if I'm not the guy who has the beard, then who the hell am I?'

" 'You sound like Rip Van Winkle to me,' laughs Grant.

"I pick up my ears. 'Rip Van Winkle!' I yell. 'That's the bozo the head dwarf mentions to me just before I hit the hay. Who is he?'

"So this Grant guy tells me a story about some jerk who lives way back when and gets lost in the mountains like I do. He meets up with a troupe of Singer's Midgets or somebody and starts bowling and drinking. They slip him some knockout drops and he goes out for the count. In fact he has such a hangover he sleeps for twenty years. At least that is the line he hands his wife when he gets back home.

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"'That sounds like me, all right,' I decide. 'So I do a twenty-year stretch on the grass. Well, there are worse places. But I see where I am plenty behind on current events. What do you hear from the mob?'

"This Grant guy doesn't know whether to take me serious or not. 'You actually claim an experience like Rip Van Winkle's?'

"'I do not make up such a line just to explain to my wife,' I say. 'Because at the moment I do not have a wife, only alimony expenses. And after twenty years I wager I do not even have to pay alimony. But make with the news broadcast, buddy. What goes on in the world? Who wings the Series last year? Are they still running the nags at Saratoga and wherever? Is Joe Louis still champion? Give out with important stuff like that.'

"Grant's face falls about a foot. 'I'm afraid the world isn't in such good shape,' he tells me.

"'You mean the New Deal hasn't cleaned things up *yet?*' I ask.

"'No, not exactly. Things are a lot better now, nationally and internationally, I suppose. You'll find plenty of new customs and fashions current, and a lot of inventions and improvements over your time. But one problem still remains. And it's a problem that's baffling me in my work right now.'

"I ASK him what it is.

"'Crime,' he tells me. 'Bootlegging. Right now I'm investigating the biggest bootlegging racket this country has ever seen.'

"'What's the matter, is Prohibition in again?' I ask.

"'Prohibition? Oh—no, it's not liquor that's being bootlegged. It's vitamins.'

"'Vitamins? You mean that alphabet stuff—like A,B,C,D? I never go for such articles personally. Give me a beefsteak rare any time.'

"'You don't understand at all,' Grant tells me. 'Vitamins are food now. Today we eat only vitamin pills. Scientific research has perfected vitamin sources of energy and nourishment during the past years, largely as a result of crop shortages and famine following the second world war. Now everyone takes a daily ration of vitamins. It's improving the stamina of the world's population. But lately large stores of synthetic vitamin capsules are being stolen—hijacked, you'd call it—from the government warehouses. Women and children are starving again in a world where we have no place for hunger and want any more. Some organized group of vandals is stealing capsules and bootlegging them to merchants. And since all vitamin production is centered at New York, and most of the capsules are stored there before distribution, the situation is grave. For weeks now, millions of capsules disappear daily. And people go hungry.

"'I am on my way back to New York from Cleveland. My clues there prove to be false leads. But unless I can crack this mess soon, it's all up with me.' Grant admits this sourly.

"'I am an old alky runner myself,' I tell him. 'Maybe when I get into town I will look up some of the old mob and see if there are any leads. If so, I will give you a buzz. How about the phone number?'

"'Use the private shortwave system,' he says. 'You'll find sending sets wherever you go. But you're not leaving me—I want to hear more about this Rip Van Winkle yarn.'

"'I got business in the city. But urgent. I will contact you later,' I promise.

"He doesn't answer. He is fiddling with his headpiece again, making a

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landing. Because before I realize it, we are already over New York. I look out. The burg is not much changed. The buildings look a little taller, but I still see the Empire State and Radio City, and I think I spot Minsky's as we circle down.

"We land just outside Flushing, in another little field. The air around us is filled with little silver specks—more planes. In fact we come down in a place that says:

PLANES PARKED—50c
OVERNIGHT HANGARS—75c
MOTOR TUNEUP—$1.00

"And a guy comes running out to wipe off the windshield. I duck out of the seat in a hurry, and head for the gate. There is a subway entrance about a block away.

" 'Hey, wait for me!' yells this Grant guy. 'I want to talk to you.'

" 'See you later,' I call back. 'I may be a little slow getting there, but I still got a five grand bet to collect from Gorilla Gabface.'

"THERE is a lot I could tell. About the rocket subway they put in instead of the old one—all new improvements, except that I still have to stand up. About the screwy way they dress, in these overalls with the lapels, and about the new type cars I see downtown that operate with these radio controls but still try to get every pedestrian who steps off the sidewalk. I notice television movie houses, too, and I kind of get to wondering what happens to the oldfashioned strip-tease, but I do not have time to find out.

"Because, like I tell this Grant, I am on my way to see Gorilla Gabface. In 1942 he hangs out behind a pool hall on Second Avenue, and I figure it is an even chance he is still there, because Gorilla is not the kind of character who gets around much. In fact he is very lazy and hardly ever moves from his chair except to kick his wife.

"So I get off the subway and start walking. The streets look no better; in fact twenty years age them the way they age me.

"On the subway persons look at me kind of peculiar and I am undoubtedly a sight, but here on Second Avenue I look quite natural—because the street is full of broken down bums.

"I get to thinking about that. I am a broken down old bum myself, now, and I hardly know what to do. But I figure once I get my hands on that five grand I will shave and dress and look around for some odds on the dogs or nags, and get back on my feet.

"Still and all it is not pleasant to hike along. Because there are a lot of sad-looking people on the street, sitting in front of their houses. Kids crying, and women with shawls around their heads, and guys sitting with their heads in their hands.

"Pretty soon I come to a long line of guys standing in front of a store. They are mumbling and double-talking under their breath. Up at the head of the line they are pushing and rattling the door to the joint, which is locked.

"All at once a guy sticks his head out of the window upstairs. 'Go away,' he says. 'Go away, all of you. Government orders. We can't sell any capsules today—vitamin shortage.'

"Guys in the line let out a groan. 'What about my family?' one yells. 'My old lady and the baby have nothing to eat for three days now, except a few capsules of C and half an ounce of E.'

" 'I'm sorry,' says the guy in the window. 'You know how it is. I'm not responsible.'

" 'We got to eat,' says the fellow in the line. 'It's those damned hijackers!

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Why don't they catch them?'

"MOST of the men turn away. I walk on. All at on once I notice a little rat-face personality sneaking up to one of the guys in the line.

" 'You want some capsules, buddy?' he whispers. 'I got some here—nice fresh stuff. A to Z, anything you want, if you'll keep your mouth shut.'

"The guy looks at rat-face kind of funny, but he says, 'I suppose I have to. My folks are hungry. How much for a two-day supply of general rations?'

"Rat-face smiles. 'Ten bucks,' he says.

" 'Ten bucks? Why that's robbery—these capsules are only 80c at a regular store!' says the guy.

"Rat-face smiles again. 'Regular store hasn't got any,' he whispers. 'You know that. Ten bucks, buddy. You're lucky to get it.'

"The guy hands him the money and gets a little tube. I don't wait to see any more, but I know rat-face is going down the line now.

"I understand what this guy Grant tells me on the plane, about the vitamin shortage. It's just like bootlegging—only with a difference. Because, you see, these people *need* food. They must have it. And to hi-jack this stuff and then sell it—well, I don't go for it, that's all. Maybe I am getting soft in my old age.

"Anyhow, I do not think about it any more, because I arrive at Gorilla's pool hall and walk in. The joint looks just the same, and it is just as empty out front. There is only one guy sitting there—a new guy to me. He has a red face with a lot of warts growing on it, and there is a dead cigarette butt in his mouth. A collar ad boy.

" 'Hello, character,' I greet him. 'Is Gorilla around?'

"Warty gives me a slow look. 'He might be. Who's looking for him?'

" 'Tell him Lefty Feep wants to see him. It's about five grand.'

" 'You got five grand?'

" 'I'm going to get five grand from him,' I correct.

"He gives me the old leer and sneer. But I stare right back, and finally he climbs off the stool and goes into the rear room. He returns in a couple minutes.

" 'Go right in,' he says.

"So I toddle back and open the door.

" 'Well, pappy?' says a voice.

"I see a big fat guy sitting at a table. He has a bald noggin and a couple spare chins, but mostly he is all jaw from the neck up and all arms from the neck down. He looks like King Kong with a bad shave.

" 'Pardon me, curly,' I state. 'Where could I find Gorilla Gabface?'

" 'In hell,' says the fat guy at the table. 'He's been dead for eighteen years. Come to think of it you don't look far from dead yourself, pappy.'

" 'Don't call me pappy!' I snap. 'Or I will let the air out of your chins, you overgrown walrus.'

"THEN the fat guy gets up from the table and I see he is about ten feet tall, or maybe six and a half anyhow. Part of him is muscle and the rest is meanness, so when he laughs I am not fooled, and when he sticks out his mitt I do not clasp it in any fraternity grip.

" 'Who are you and what do you want?' he says, moving around toward me.

" 'I am Lefty Feep, and Gorilla Gabface owes me five Gs on the dog-races,' I repeat, stubborn. Only my feet are not stubborn, because they back me to the door.

" 'Well I am Gorilla's nephew and I am running this show now for many's

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the year. I do not ever hear my uncle mention your name, and he certainly never mentions owing anyone five pennies, let alone five grand. So my advice to you, Feep, is to get out of here before I strangle you in your whiskers, you old sponge!'

"'I take it you do not wish to pay me?' I inquire, just to make sure.

"The fat guy reaches out across the floor with one hand, which wraps around my neck. 'No,' he says, lifting me off the floor and shaking me like a used bar-rag. 'Though I can see you have a good use for five thousand dollars, if only to pay hospital expenses after I get through beating you up.'

"This is not exactly good news to me, and it is even less good when he smacks me one on the side of the head. I am just hanging there helpless while the fat guy draws back for another clout, when all at once he drops me to the floor.

"Another guy comes in behind me, and he attracts the fat guy's attention. I lie there on the floor looking up and I see the newcomer is none other than Rat-face, the slug that was selling bootleg vitamin capsules to the citizens in front of the market.

"He is so excited he does not even notice me, and nearly steps on my face while I am lying there. 'It's going great, Boss!' he yells to the fat guy. 'I sell three hundred bucks of pills in the last hour. The rest of the mob is covering the district. We are running out of stock.'

"RAT-FACE is still talking when Wart-face comes in from the front room. He has an acetylene torch in one hand. 'The boys are ready to tunnel through to the Government warehouse again this evening,' he says. 'Shall I send the trucks over?'

"Fat guy looks at the two of them kind of funny. 'You birds talk too much,' he says. 'Here,' he says to Rat-face. 'Go back out and tell the mob to stop selling for today. We don't want to flood the market all at once.' Then he turns to Wart-face. 'Get down to the warehouse. The boys are tunneling through from the building alongside. But leave this torch with me. I think I got to use it. Now—powder!'

"The two guys back out of the room without even noticing me. I am lying on the floor listening to the birdies from that crack on the head, but I am also thinking. If these guys are the ones Grant is after, they have been running this bootleg vitamin racket from this place. One gang must be tunneling through to steal Government supplies, and the other gang goes out and sells the pills. And this fat guy is the brain.

"So there I am, locked in a room with Gorilla's nephew. I am sixty years old, I have no equalizer, and he is a pretty tough customer.

"What he has to say to me is not encouraging, either. He stands over me and looks down with a very nasty grin. 'I am sorry about you, pappy,' he says. 'I only intend to beat you up and send you to a hospital. But now you hear a little too much, so I think your next stop is the morgue.'

"I think in high gear. 'Have a heart,' I tell him. 'I am an oldtimer myself. I know your late uncle, in fact I am associated with him, you might say. I just do a twenty-year stretch, but I am an uptown boy. I can help you plenty.'

"Fat guy stands right over me and laughs some more. 'No use, pappy,' he says. 'You old-fashioned gangsters are all through. We don't use rods and rattlers any more. This is big business. I am bucking the Federal Government myself, and winning. Why, we got eighty million vitamin food capsules stored away under this joint, and we're

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tunneling through tonight for another thirty million. I got a hundred guys out organized to cover bootleg territories. It's big business. We got a dozen cities at our mercy. Do you think I am some cheesy little punk in back of a poolroom like my late uncle? Not for a minute—this is big time stuff and you has-beens are no good.'

"'But give me a chance—I know a few tricks,' I plead.

"He turns on the laugh again. 'Not on your life,' he chuckles. 'And speaking of your life, here goes.'

"So he reaches down for the acetylene torch and the interview is over.

"FIFTEEN minutes later, after I locate this guy Grant by shortwave from a cigar store on the corner, he arrives and claps the cuffs on the fat guy. Also his men surround the pool hall and snag Rat-face and his pals when they drift in from time to time.

"They also capture, I hear later, all the mob down at the tunnel job, and they find the stores of capsules in a big cellar warehouse hidden downstairs.

"So all in all it turns out to be a good thing for this guy Grant. And also for me, when I learn the Government is paying a five grand reward for turning up the vitamin racketeers.

"Two days later the money comes through. Meanwhile I pal around with Grant and eat vitamins in restaurants. That is why I get so sick of them.

"In fact, on the third day I am sitting in a hamburger stand making faces while I gulp down my third order of the dizzy beef pills with a ketchup drop on the side. Grant is with me, and he says, 'Well, what are you going to do with the reward—go into business for yourself?'

"That is when I get mad. 'No,' I tell him. 'I am not cut out for this day and age, I see that. I am too old to start in again, I do not like the class of people that run the rackets nowadays, and besides I do not see any strip shows in progress at all. More and over, these vitamin pills ruin my digestion and I have not even got an excuse to carry a toothpick. I think maybe I am better off back in 1942.'

"'Too bad,' Grant tells me. 'Those days are gone forever.'

"But I do not hear him. I am staring at a calendar on the wall. 'April 29th!' I holler. 'Listen, do you or do you not tell me I sleep for 20 years and 360 days? And do I or do I not spend 4 more days here? That makes tomorrow April 30th again!'

"'So what?' Grant asks.

"'So that means tomorrow is the annual picnic of the Diminutive Society of the Catskill Mountains. Hop into that plane of yours—we're going to see those dwarfs and give them a little proposition.'

"WHICH is just what we do. Grant lets me off near the top of the mountains the next morning. I go up and find the dwarfs bowling as usual. They are surprised to see me, and kind of embarrassed, till I get the head shorty off.

"I ask him if he has got anything to drink that will send me back to where I was. He plays smart and says no. Then I tell him that fun is fun, and a gag is a gag, but I want to go back and am ready to pay for the trip.

"This gets him interested, and he asks what the deal is. I tell him. He gets excited and calls a conference. Well, to make a long story short, they get together with me and the head shorty goes off and mixes up a fresh drink. Not beer, but something else. I promise not to mention it. Then I take care of my end of the bargain and drink the stuff.

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"It puts me out right away. And when I wake up everything is O.K. It is morning and when I hike down the mountain I find out that it is May 1st, 1942.

"I wire ahead for some funds, and rush into town. The first place I head for is here, because after eating nothing but vitamins for four days, I am plenty hungry."

* * *

LEFTY FEEP concluded his story with a profound sigh. It was followed by a snort from over my shoulder.

Jack stood there with the tray of food.

"What did I tell you?" he asked me. "Did you ever hear such a line in your life?"

Feep bridled. "What is wrong with my story, I would like to know?" he asked.

Jack snorted again. "Everything. But even if I believed it—which I don't—there are just a few things that puzzle me. To begin with, I thought you were at the mercy of that fat guy in the back room of the pool hall. He was going to kill you with an acetylene torch, wasn't he? In fact you were lying there on the floor and he was standing over you. And yet you say that fifteen minutes later you walked out free and left him there to be captured."

"Oh, that?" said Lefty Feep. "That is very simple. Like I say, this guy thinks he is so smart, and that old-timers do not know any clever tricks. But I have one trick up my sleeve he does not know. It is a very ordinary trick today and much used in the rackets—but I suppose he never hears of it in 1962, I am lying there on the floor, he reaches down for the torch, but I grab it first. He shoves his foot down on my arm, but then I pull this old-fashioned trick on him, like I say. I merely turn on the torch and give him the hot-foot. And if you do not think a hot-foot with a torch is effective, you are crazy."

Jack turned crimson. "All right, I give up," he sighed. "But just one thing more. About that deal you made with the dwarfs."

"What about it?"

"Well, certainly you didn't just offer them money. They have no use for money."

Feep smiled. "Of course not. But I use the money to make the deal. I buy something the dwarfs will really go for. That is what I tell the head shorty to make him go through with it. I tell him I will give his little pals something they can use at their picnics from now on."

"And what is that?"

"A modern bowling alley. Sure—I tell him I contract to build a bowling alley right on top of the mountain, so they can organize a league and get into the tournaments. In fact, next year I am going back there again and play them myself. Maybe you would like to get on the team?"

"Come on," said Jack to me. "Let's you and I get out of here."

We left the table, but Feep didn't see us go. He was tearing apart the roast chicken with the famished look of a man who has eaten nothing but pills for four days.

COMING! The amazing sequel to "The City Of Lost Souls" by Ralph Milne Farley and Al P. Nelson. Don Warren, lone survivor of the three-thousand of the Legion Of Death who rode into the Martian desert, goes back to the city of Daloss and finds there the greatest adventure of them all—and regains a paradise he had thought lost forever! Don't fail to watch for the coming of this story. You yourself asked for it!

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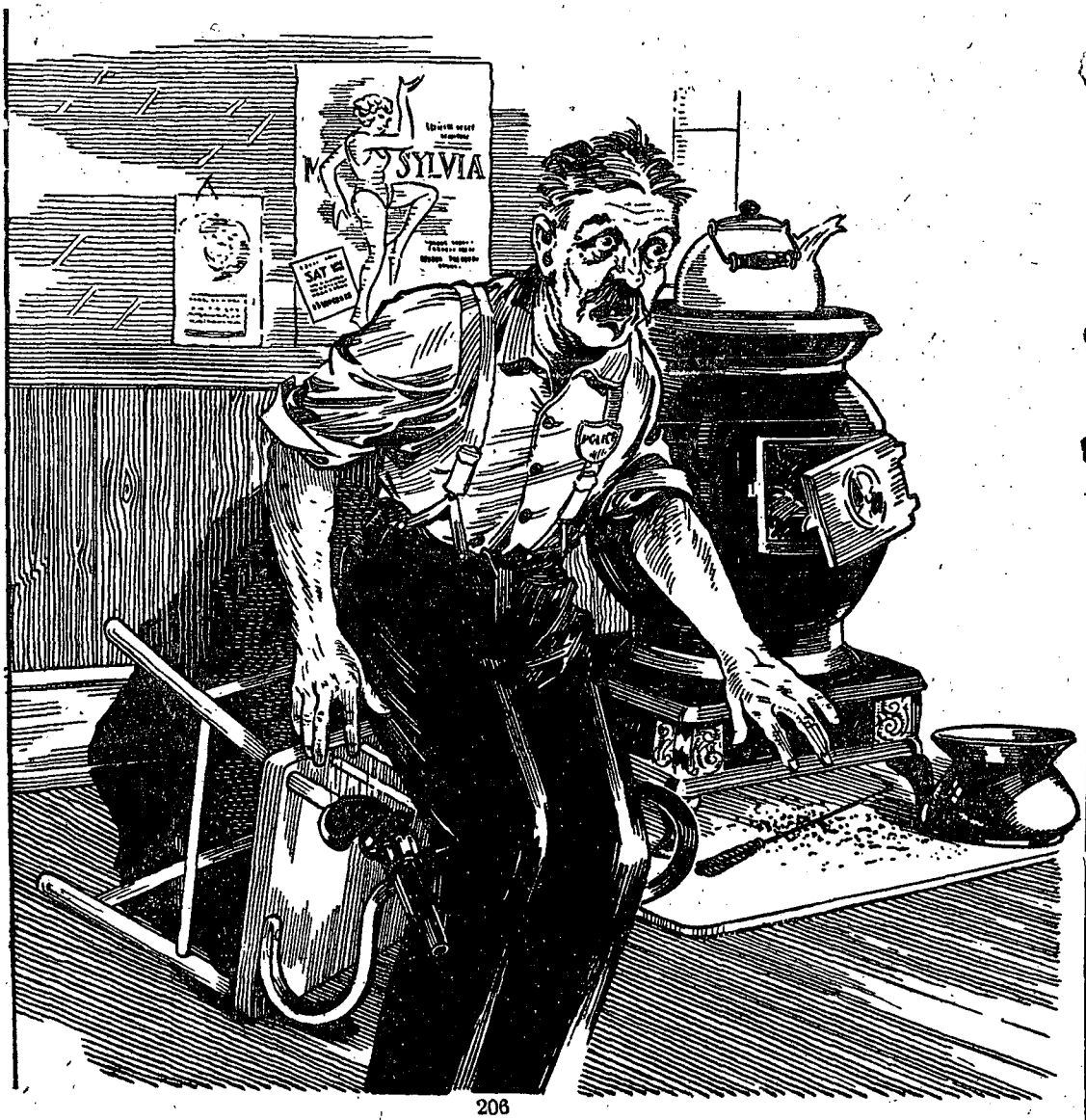
BERTIE and the BLACK ARTS

by

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Black arts or not, one thousand tickets to the big game were worth $50 per—so Bertie sold 'em!



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"So long, Pop," said Bertie. "I'll be going now."

WHEN the Mosswood college football special rattled to a stop in the sleepy little depot on the outskirts of Mosswood, it disgorged some three hundred pennant-waving, red-faced, drunkenly vociferous alumni. These blithe spirits swarmed over the waiting room, shouting to friends, yelling at cab drivers and in general behaving with the careless abandon that is the stamp of men released from the sober vigilance of their wives.

Among this carnival of happy souls Bertie Crimmins stood out like a beacon on a dark night. Or like a professional pallbearer in the midst of a New Year's Eve celebration.

He was a tall, slim young man and, except for the pleasantly vacant look on his face he might have been considered handsome. He stood out in the crowd because he was wearing his hat instead of waving it wildly over his head. Also he was sober. On top of all this he carried no pennants and was

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not pounding someone on the back and shouting at the top of his voice.

There was, however, a certain wistful light in his eyes, as he surveyed the antics of his companions. Once, as the chorus of the Mosswood school song was being chanted by an inebriated and off-key quartet, his lips began to move automatically and the song almost poured forth of its own volition.

As he stood in the center of the depot looking about expectantly, a chubby, red-faced chap holding a bottle in one hand stumbled into him.

"Ssssorry," he mumbled, swaying slightly. Then his eyes lighted with recognition. "My old pal, Bertie Crimmins!" he cried emotionally. "I didn't know you were coming down for the ol' game. Have a drink, pal, have a drink."

He shoved the bottle toward Bertie.

Bertie looked at it longingly, but shook his head.

"I'm not using the stuff," he said weakly.

His cock-eyed friend stared at him with incredulous disbelief.

"You don't say," he mumbled in astonishment. "You were the best ol' rum pot in school when I was here. Member the time ol' Prexy caught the two of us, blind drunk, in the girl's dressing room at the Senior Prom? That was some time, wasn't it?"

"Y—yes it was," Bertie said hastily. He wiped his suddenly damp brow, and glanced nervously about the depot.

"You know sumpn'," his drunken chum tittered, "I always wondered what ol' Prexy was doing there, himself."

In spite of conscience, Bertie found himself warming to the subject.

"Was odd, wasn't it?" he said. "Do you suppose the old bounder—"

"Hello, Bertrand," a soft voice beside him said.

BERTIE froze in mid-sentence. At his side was a slim, lovely blonde girl with deep blue eyes. There was just a touch of frost in those lovely eyes now.

"Darling," Bertie cried nervously. "You're looking wonderful. Positively radiant. Let's go outside. Out in the clean, fresh air. Away from these—er—gross people."

He turned to the chubby drunk and said firmly,

"There are no more trains arriving today, my good man. That's all you wanted to know, is it not?"

Without waiting for an answer, he grabbed the lovely blonde girl by the arm and towed her out of the depot into the fresh air.

There he breathed deeply, not for health's sake, but from sheer relief.

Ann Turner, the lovely blonde girl, regarded him dubiously.

"Bertie, dear," she said, "you haven't broken any of your promises have you?"

"Silly girl," Bertie laughed. "I have been the epitome of respectability these last two months."

"No drinking?"

"Not a drop."

"Poker?"

"Certainly not."

"Horses?"

"My dear little cherub, I haven't even nodded to a milkman's horse. That should prove that I can be the steady, reliable type, what?"

Bertie Crimmins' problem was not a new one. In college he had been a happy, care-free soul and the stigma of his undergraduate days had a nasty way of sticking to him. When he had met The Girl, it turned out that she had heard of his primrosy path and, as a result, was dubious about the double harness idea he had suggested one moonlight night. So he had been

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put on probation and, to his credit, he had survived the ordeal manfully.

"You do look different," Ann said thoughtfully. "You have a very respectable look in your eyes."

Inwardly, Bertie sighed. He had slipped far if his stare at a luscious girl could be described as respectable. But he said:

"Right you are. Babbit Bertie, they call me. Now will you marry me?"

"What will we live on?" Ann asked practically.

BERTIE almost swooned with delight at this time-honored question. For it meant that The Girl was practically in his arms for keeps.

"A sensible question," he said approvingly. "But you may cease worrying on that score. My brother, who is a good enough chap in his way, controls the purse strings of the Crimmins estates. The foolish chap cares nothing for money himself, but he has refused to pass along any of the bonny green stuff to me. You see he hasn't much confidence in me. But when he sees the remarkable transformation I have undergone, he will give me his blessings and large chunks of lettuce with which we can furnish our nest."

"Where is your brother?"

"Right here at Mosswood. He's assistant professor of almost forgotten languages, or something like that. Odd, what?"

"Will you see him today?"

"First thing," Bertie answered cheerfully. "I'll drop you home and then speed the body over to his rooms to show him what a sterling chap I've turned into."

He waved for a cab.

A half hour later Bertie stepped from the cab, a feeling of virtuous confidence in his heart. He had dropped Ann off a few minutes before and her farewell had been affectionately tender. It was obvious that she was impressed by the New Bertie.

Bertie paid off the driver with his last remaining change and headed up the elm-lined walk that led to the unpretentiously dignified house where his brother lived and labored.

There was a song in his heart and a bounce in his stride as he trotted up the steps and punched the doorbell. His brother's housekeeper opened the door and after murmuring "speak of the devil" or something equally cheery, admitted him.

She led the way to his brother's study in a grim silence. She did not approve of Bertie Crimmins interrupting his brother in the middle of his work. She paused before an oak-paneled door.

"Mister Arthur is very busy these days," she said coldly. "I hope you will not disturb him too much."

"Oh, I won't," Bertie said warmly. "I'll only be here for the week-end."

"Only? Couldn't you manage to stay a full week?"

Sarcasm was lost on Bertie.

"Nice of you," he said brightly, "but it just can't be done. Sorry and all that."

WITH a warm feeling of being in demand he opened the oak-paneled door and strode into his brother's study.

"What ho!" he cried.

His brother, a lean scholarly looking chap, with graying temples and horn-rimmed glasses, looked up from his desk where he had been intently examining a faded piece of parchment.

There was a distinct trace of annoyance in his tired blue eyes.

"Must you bellow?" he said impatiently.

"Sorry," Bertie said. "Didn't realize the old vocal chords had that much vim

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and vigor. Must be the old brotherly affection cropping out."

"Stop babbling," his brother said. "Come in and close the door. I'm busy here. Be through in a moment. Sit down."

"Right ho!" Bertie said. "Don't let me disturb the great brain. Let it ramble on. I'll sit and watch."

"In silence," his brother qualified.

Bertie found a comfortable chair and threw his lean body over it in a position that a professional contortionist might have envied. His brother had turned back to his desk, his head bent close to the ancient parchment. He only changed his position to turn the pages of a huge leather bound book resting on the desk beside him.

Bertie gazed about at the book lined walls and sighed. It didn't hardly seem decent to give a million dollars to a buzzard who spent his waking hours digging into the remains of obscure authors.

He was disturbed by an exultant exclamation from his brother.

"Got a nibble?" he asked companionably.

His brother's thin frame was trembling with excitement.

"If," he muttered tensely, "I can prove a relationship between the recurrence of this symbol and the recurrence of the letter 'e' in the Phoenician alphabet, I may have something."

"Probably alphabet soup," Bertie said brightly. "Get it! Letter 'e' mixed up with something else and you get alphabet soup. It's a joke, what?"

His brother turned to him, the scientific zeal in his eyes fading slowly.

"Bertie," he said slowly, "you are a blithering moron. On top of that—"

"Tut! tut!" Bertie said hastily. "Mustn't forget the old brotherly affection."

"You make it easy to," his brother said sadly.

"It's nice of you to say so," Bertie beamed. "Now I've a surprise for you. I'm getting married. Congratulate me."

"Married?" his brother said sharply.

"Right ho! It's a blow, but you must be strong. You're not losing a brother, you know, you're gaining a sister."

HIS brother lighted a pipe carefully and peered over the flame at Bertie as one might at an amiable nit wit.

"What are you going to live on?" he asked.

"Glad you brought that up, old bean," Bertie said. "We'll be needing a spot of assistance and I thought that you might bless the union with a hearty hunk of the old necessary."

"Translated, that means I am to finance your marriage?"

"Crudely put, but accurate," Bertie admitted.

"I shall do no such thing. In my opinion you are about as competent to handle money as a two-months-old baby. The bulk of the family estate will revert to you when I think you are capable of handling it intelligently. That date, I regret to say, does not seem imminent."

"You mean," Bertie said glumly, "that it's no soap."

"I mean precisely that."

"But I'm a new man," Bertie said frantically. "Old salt of the earth, backbone of the nation. No more of the cup that cheers, no more of the gay race tracks. All over, all done with."

His brother looked at him skeptically.

"In the vernacular, I am from the state of Missouri. If you are actually the paragon of masculine virtue that you claim, I might reconsider."

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"A chance is all I ask," Bertie said dramatically. "Tell me," he said in a more conventional tone, "does the family estate mount up to a tidy bit?"

"Very tidy," his brother answered. "Several millions at least."

Bertie had no conception of amounts over ten, but he knew a million to be a hefty lot of money. He wondered if it would be enough to pay off his debts and set him and Ann up in a cozy flat?

His brother disrupted his thoughts by rising to his feet and picking up the parchment from the desk with a gesture of disgust.

"Money is the most helpless thing in the world," he said scathingly. "It is nothing in itself. Men's cupidity lends it value. The real and lasting things of this world are the things that can be locked away in the vaults of the mind. I would trade all the riches of the world for the translation of this parchment I hold in my hand."

Bertie looked at the parchment with new respect.

"What is it?" he asked. "A new system on the ponies?"

His brother sighed and placed the parchment carefully in the drawer of the desk. There was a despairing gleam in his eye.

"Make yourself at home," he said. "I am going out. In the park the birds are chattering and the loons are on the lake, so I will be thinking of you, Bertrand."

AFTER his brother had left Bertie prowled about the library, glancing vaguely at the grimly titled books on the shelves, and musing darkly on his own troubles.

Things did look pretty blackish, he decided with a sigh. It was apparent that his brother's opinion concerning him had not undergone any changes for the better in the past months. And if his brother didn't change his mind, Lohengrin was a long way off.

Saddened, Bertie slumped into the chair before his brother's desk. But Bertie's mind, such as it was, was incapable of dwelling for more than two consecutive minutes on any problem. Even his own feeling of frustration and disappointment faded away, leaving him again his vacantly cheerful self.

Whistling, he picked up the massive, black leather bound book from his brother's desk. In the back of his mind was the vague idea that since his brother practically burned incense before these crypts of entombed learning, it would do him no harm to dip into their musty depths and see what was what.

The first yellowed page of the book bore, in archaic lettering, the ominous inscription,

Black Arts of the
Nether Cosmos

Interested, Bertie turned another page. There, he learned after glancing down a few paragraphs, the proper technique for summoning forth the demons from the sixth pit of the fourth lower world.

"Well, well," muttered Bertie. "It's darned simple at that. If anybody wanted a demon it shouldn't be hard to arrange things."

Thoroughly entranced, he browsed on, until he came to a tattered page which was headed in solid black letters,

FORMULA FOR MYSTIC CLARIFICATION

There he paused. As nearly as he could figure it out one had simply to mutter a bit of mumbo-jumbo and—presto! everything became as clear as

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crystal. He thought wistfully of the excellent use he could have put this device in his college days.

It was typical of Bertie that a book of mysterious incantations, designed to call up demons and impart superhuman knowledge, would cause him no surprise. He had a naive confidence in the printed word; to the extent that anything on paper was automatically true.

As he was about to turn the page a wonderful thought popped into his head. It was so beautifully simple that it took his breath away.

QUICKLY he re-read the directions on the Mystic Clarification page. They weren't difficult. In fact it only took him a few minutes to repeat aloud the incantation that was part of the ritual. He waited a moment then, expecting something in the way of a blazing ball to explode in his head, but nothing happened.

Undaunted he pulled open the drawer of his brother's desk and removed the heavy parchment which his brother had been vainly attempting to translate.

After a quick glance over the symbols inscribed on its ancient surface he chuckled heartily.

"It works," he cried gleefully.

Picking up a pencil from the desk he scribbled down the translation on the back of a piece of scratch paper. This would certainly set him in solid with his brother. It was wonderfully simple. Why, it was just as easy as reading something written in English.

This idea had hardly grazed his mind, when a dampening thought occurred to him. Glancing at the writing on the parchment paper again was enough to clinch his suspicions. The thing *was* written in English. Even Bertie possessed sufficient intelligence to realize that it was this that made the translation so simple.

The pencil slipped from his disappointed fingers. He obviously had the wrong parchment. A hurried search of the desk drawer and the shelves over the desk disclosed no other untranslatable parchments, so he assumed, with one of his unusual flashes of brilliance, that his brother must have put the document somewhere else.

"Oh well," he sighed, "his loss after all."

With a shrug he turned back to the fascinating book. For the rest of the afternoon he amused himself by reciting aloud a number of the euphonious incantations, all of which applied to various types of goblins, witches and demons. He had reached voodooism when the sport began to pall on him. After all even the creatures of the Nether Cosmos grow tiresome if taken in too large doses.

With a yawn he tossed the heavy book back to the desk and sauntered from the library. The house was dark. No cheery bustling from the region of the kitchen indicated that toothsome meals were being prepared for him, so, with a martyred sigh, he ascended the stairs to the guest bed room.

He wasn't really hungry, for he had eaten on the train, so he decided to hit the hay and thus convince his brother that he was really the soul of virtuous respectability. Ordinarily the eve of the traditional game between State and Mosswood college would find Bertie carousing about the bright spots of the town, wassailing with boon and beery companions until the wee sma'. When his brother returned and found him tucked peacefully away in bed and sleeping the sleep of the innocent and the just, perhaps it would soften his heart a bit.

So with these cheerful speculations

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buzzing about in his head Bertie turned off the dark hallway and groped his way into the bed room he intended to occupy.

POSSIBLY it was because of this preoccupation that he did not notice the acrid odor of sulphurous smoke which was drifting through the room. That is, he didn't notice it right away.

It wasn't until he was in the middle of the room that he paused and sniffed the air.

"What ho!" he said, startled. "Something burning I'll bet."

Bertie was generally not so swift with his deductions. Now, possibly as a result of his studious afternoon, he was unusually sharp.

"Where there's smoke there's fire," he reasoned shrewdly.

He was just moving to the window to let in a little fresh air when he noticed a peculiar thing.

Circling him on all sides and silhouetted against the blackness of the room were several dozen pairs of gleaming white eyes.

Bertie glanced carefully about to be sure he was not imagining things. His scrutiny convinced him that he was not imagining anything at all. The eyes *were* there, round and white, and they all seemed to be staring directly at him.

Now the average young man stumbling into a room full of staring white eyes would probably do his thinking with his legs and dash from the room at top speed.

This would have been the sensible thing to do, which is probably why Bertie did nothing of the sort.

He peered at the circle of eyes with interest.

As his eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness of the room he made out several dark shapes perched about. They appeared only as vague outlines and their shadowy forms were unlike anything Bertie had ever seen. Of their faces he could see nothing. Only the white staring eyes and the lumpy black shapes were visible. There must have been at least eight or ten of them, perched on the furniture of the room.

"Well, well," Bertie muttered.

He was not frightened, but he had the strange feeling that he should have been. The situation was rapidly developing into an impasse. After all he couldn't just stand there and stare at these strange things which had chosen his bedroom as a roosting place.

He cleared his throat, while he tried to think of something that would more or less break the ice.

"Well, well," he said finally. "Warm for May, isn't it?"

THERE was a sound like the rustle of dead leaves as one of the vague, formless shapes seemed to stir slightly. A soft, strangely toneless voice said,

"We have come to do your bidding, Oh Master. From the haunts of the nether cosmos we have traveled. By the unseen powers that bind us, what is your wish?"

Bertie listened to the sepulchral voice with mingled emotions. He was touched by the fact that these things—whatever they were—seemed to be anxious to help him. That, however, did not alter the fact that there was something deuced peculiar about the whole matter.

"Well," he said uncertainly, "it's nice of you to—to stop in like this. But just who are you, anyway?"

"I am Xanthos," the toneless voice replied softly.

Peering about Bertie couldn't tell which of the shadowy beings was speaking. Not that it made a great deal of difference.

"I'm Crimmins, Bertie Crimmins,"

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Bertie said companionably, "Class of '39. Are you boys here for the game tomorrow?"

"We are here," the toneless voice replied, "to do your bidding."

"Very nice of you," Bertie said warmly, "but I don't need anything just now. If I do I'll be glad to throw the business your way."

There was no answer from the darkness. Peering about Bertie saw that the circle of eyes had disappeared and that the formless dark shapes had likewise vanished. He also noticed that the annoying odor of brimstone and sulphur had faded away.

"Well, well," he said. "Neat trick, what?"

He stepped over and flicked on the light switch. Everything in the room seemed quite normal. It was unoccupied and the covers of the bed were turned down invitingly.

So Bertie undressed and went to bed.

He was just dozing off when a hazy fragment of thought brushed his mind, driving sleep away. Where had those strange dark creatures come from? Who and what were they?

These were the thoughts that buzzed about in his head like gadflies. They obviously weren't college students or star boarders. The more he toyed with the problem the more interesting it became.

He tossed from one side to the other, tangling the covers about his neck. It must have been fully five minutes before the light dawned on Bertie.

When it did he almost chuckled out loud in relief.

The things—the vague black shapes—were obviously creatures such as described in the ancient leather bound book he had found on his brother's desk. That was the first step of his reasoning. The second was simplicity itself. In his reading from the leather-bound book he had apparently called these creatures to his side. One of the mysterious incantations must have done the trick.

"Kind of a nasty stunt to pull on them," he said thoughtfully. "But," he decided philosophically, "it can't be helped now. Whatever they are—demons, ghosts or ghouls—they're here and they'll just have to make the best of it."

With a relieved sigh he snuggled down into the covers. Now he could sleep. With his little mystery logically explained he could close his eyes peacefully. He even felt somewhat superior about the matter. It wasn't everyone who could whistle up a roomful of demons. No sir!

He slept like a babe.

THE next morning he awoke, cheerful and refreshed and after a brisk shower trotted downstairs whistling enthusiastically.

His brother's housekeeper met him at the foot of the stairs.

"Morning," Bertie said brightly. "What's sizzling for breakfast?"

"Breakfast was over two hours ago," the housekeeper answered. It was apparent that this fact gave her a good deal of satisfaction.

"Oh," Bertie said, his spirit wilting at the prospect of a breakfastless morning. "Well, is the big brain up yet?"

"If you are referring to your brother, he left some time ago. I believe he intended to meet the president of the college on a very important matter."

"Oh," Bertie said again.

Looking at his brother's housekeeper's grim jaw he decided that the prospects of wangling a spot of breakfast from her were extremely slim.

So, he decided to take his famished frame off to the local hotel, where he could also arrange for tickets for the

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day's game between Mosswood and State and phone Ann.

With a stiff bow to the housekeeper he wrapped his injured dignity about him like a cloak and left the house.

The hotel lobby was a swarming mass of pennant-waving alumni and sharp looking bookmakers who were taking and giving bets on the game.

Bertie made for the hotel dining room and he was halfway through a plate of bacon and eggs when a disquieting thought struck him.

He signaled a waiter.

"I say," he said, "I just remembered that I haven't got tickets for today's game yet. Can't imagine how it slipped my mind. Will you pick me up a couple and bring them here like a fine fellow."

The waiter looked at him in slight astonishment.

"You can't be serious, sir. Surely you must know that this game has been sold out for weeks. Why yesterday the scalpers were getting sixty dollars a pair for tickets. But now there are none available at any price."

"Hmmmmm," Bertie said thoughtfully. This was a pretty kettle of fish. Ann had her heart set on seeing the game. So, as a matter of fact, had Bertie. It would be more than tragic to miss it.

"Nothing you can do at all?" he asked the waiter.

"Not a thing, sir."

"Very good. Thank you."

"Yes sir." The waiter moved away, leaving Bertie to his solitary gloom.

He speared a piece of bacon with unwonted savagery.

"I wish I had a ticket," he muttered. "No, I wish I had two. There's Ann to think of. I wish I had a hundred, a thousand of them."

THERE was a faint rustle beside him. It was a sound like dry leaves scraping over hard, cold earth. Bertie hardly noticed it. He was so engrossed in his own misery that he didn't hear the soft, toneless voice whisper,

"As you wish, Master!"

He went on eating, wondering what he could possibly use as an explanation to Ann. At last he was forced to the realization that nothing he could tell her would help things. She would consider this just another cotton-headed lapse on his part.

He was walking away from the table when the waiter's voice called after him.

"Just a moment, sir. You're forgetting your package."

Bertie turned and saw that the waiter was lifting a small package from the table he had just left. The package was wrapped in brown paper and was about eight inches square.

"Is that mine?" he asked blankly.

"It must be," the waiter said. "I know it wasn't here when you arrived. I had just cleared the table and I remember distinctly."

Bertie took the package in his hand. It wasn't very heavy. He tried to remember whether or not he had had a package with him when he entered the hotel. The effort was a failure. He couldn't. It might be his at that."

"Thanks," he said, "silly of me to forget it."

He sauntered toward the lobby carelessly removing the outside wrappings from the package. After all if it belonged to him he had a right to know what it was, didn't he?

As he reached the entrance of the lobby he had finished ripping the paper from the object. Only then did he glance down to see what it was he had been carrying about with him.

His knees almost failed him at the sight.

For the package contained three neat stacks of tickets to the game between

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Mosswood and State. There must have been at least a thousand tickets and all of them were for locations from the forty to the forty yard line.

He was still standing, staring dumbly at the stacks of ducats when a heavy set, florid faced man bumped into him.

"Watch where you're going," the man growled. He started to pass on, but then his eye dropped to the bundle of tickets Bertie was holding in his hands. His eyes lighted excitedly.

"Are those for today's game?" he demanded tensely.

"Why, yes," Bertie said. "I guess they are."

"For sale?" the man snapped.

The idea hadn't occurred to Bertie, but now he examined it and found it an excellent one.

"All but two," he answered.

The florid-faced man pulled out a well padded wallet.

"I'll give you fifty for a pair," he said. "Okay?"

"That seems a fair price," Bertie said thoughtfully.

THE man paid him and Bertie gave him two tickets on the fifty yard line.

"Tell your friends," Bertie said genially. "Plenty left."

He pocketed the money with a pleased smile and strolled on. This was excellent. Very fine, indeed.

Before he reached the center of the lobby he was receiving quite a bit of attention. Men stared unbelievingly at the thick stacks of tickets in his hands, then edged closer to him.

In no time at all Bertie made two more sales and now he had one hundred and fifty dollars in his pocket.

As the word flashed about the lobby that tickets were being sold, something in the nature of a mild stampede resulted.

"Don't crowd, don't crowd," Bertie said affably. "There's plenty here for everybody."

To facilitate things he climbed onto a table in the center of the lobby. There he was able to pass out the tickets to the crowd below him with little difficulty. From their extended hands he plucked the green bills and the feeling of happiness within him grew deeper with each additional purchase.

"Thank you, thank you," he said. "It's really dirt cheap, you know. It's practically a steal. Thank you, and you too. Who else? There you are. Fifty dollars to see Mosswood beat State is practically a robbery."

Bertie became aware of a sharp featured, nattily dressed chap standing directly in front of the table, glancing up at him with unwinking gray eyes.

"Yes sir," he said genially, "how many?"

"I got tickets," the sharp featured little man answered, "I just heard you say Mosswood's goin' to beat State. Would you care to back that up with a little cash?"

"My dear fellow," Bertie said in a kind voice, "do you actually mean to tell me that you have money to throw away? State does not have a chance, that's all there is to it. Save your lettuce, my good chap. Invest it in annuities or life insurance, but don't bet on State."

The nattily dressed fellow pulled a roll of bills from his pocket.

"I'm not worrying. If you're on Mosswood, put up or shut up."

Bertie's pride was touched to the quick.

"Sir," he said, "name the amount and make it light on yourself."

It took only a few moments to arrange the bet. The money was held by the hotel desk clerk. Bertie bet every cent he had made on the tickets and

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felt stoutly virtuous about it. After all, it wasn't really gambling. It was just a quick pleasant manner of doubling his stakes.

THE bet made, the sharp featured little gambler smirked unpleasantly at him and swaggered away.

"Who is he?" Bertie asked the clerk

"Him? Oh he's one of the bookmakers who comes down to this game every year. They call him Sure Thing Lindsay."

"Hmmmm," Bertie said.

"That's because he never bets on anything *but* a sure thing."

"Hmmmm," Bertie said again. "Sure Thing Lindsay, eh?"

It was while he was musing upon the unpleasant things that Mr. Lindsay's nickname suggested that he felt a firm tap on his shoulder.

Turning, he was confronted by two solidly built gentlemen, dressed in gray overcoats and gray fedoras and wearing large black shoes.

"You the guy who's scalping the tickets?" one of them asked.

Bertie's spirits rose. Here was fresh fish.

"I'm the one, boys," he said cheerfully. "Better get 'em now before the price goes up. How many?"

"Probably one to ten," one of the gray overcoated men said grimly. He pulled a badge from his pocket and shoved it under Bertie's nose. "We've been warning you scalpers all week and now I think we're goin' to make an example out of you. We didn't think we'd find any of you dumb enough to scalp tickets right in the lobby of the leading hotel."

"Now just a minute, gentlemen," Bertie said feebly. "This is all some terrible mistake."

"You said it. And you're the one that made it. Come on."

Bertie heard a metallic click and felt cold steel on his wrists. Handcuffed, and with a burly plainclothes man on either side of him, he was led across the lobby, protesting weakly and vainly.

Things looked very black. Gloomy thoughts bobbed through his head. What kind of a country was this turning into, anyway? A man tried to pick up an honest penny and he found himself bundled off to the bastille for possessing a little initiative.

He would certainly miss the game now. And so would Ann. Worse, he couldn't get in touch with her and tell her he was in jail. That definitely would not be wise.

It was a terrible mess. He didn't see how things could possibly be worse.

In this dark mood he was hustled across the lobby to the revolving doors that led to the street. There, to his intense humiliation, he was forced to stand like a culprit in the dock, while a steady flow of morbidly curious people surged past him.

Feeling as hounded and persecuted as Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables,* he nevertheless affected a blandly nonchalant pose. He even hummed a popular ditty and kept time with his feet. He'd show 'em. Let them try and break his spirit. So absorbed was he in this role that he didn't notice the last two people to enter the revolving door.

He had no idea that disaster was practically nipping at his heels until a smooth, icily cold voice inquired,

"Is this your rehabilitated self?"

BERTIE jerked himself around, the breath left his lungs in a gust as he recognized the cold, stern features of his brother.

With his brother was a short, thin, scholarly looking gentleman whom Bertie also recognized. This was Profes-

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sor Overton, president of Mosswood college.

He was peering near-sightedly at Bertie through his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"I say, Professor," he said to Bertie's brother, "this chap with the handcuffs on reminds me of your brother."

"He *is* my brother," Bertie's brother said bitterly. "What's the charge, officer?" he asked, turning to one of the plain-clothes men.

"Scalping football tickets, peddling without a license, disturbing the peace and probably grand larceny."

"Grand larceny!" Bertie gasped in outraged indignation. "I haven't stolen anything."

"Where'd you get them tickets?"

"I found them," Bertie said stoutly.

Bertie's brother shook his head grimly.

"This," he said, "is only a concrete example of what I told you yesterday. You are still mentally and physically incompetent. Anything which I can do to prevent your marrying some unsuspecting girl I most certainly will do. You have disgraced me completely, Bertrand. Continue with your duty, officers."

Bertie was shoved through the revolving door, his protests and promises flowing back over his shoulder. Outside, one more calamitous experience was awaiting him.

Alighting from a cab at the entrance of the hotel was a slim, lovely blonde girl. As she turned to enter the hotel, Bertie staggered through the revolving door, his handcuffed hands extended before him to keep his balance.

The lovely blonde girl paused for an instant, then with a sob she turned and stepped back into the cab.

Only then did Bertie recognize her.

"Ann!" he cried frantically. "Ann! Things aren't as bad as they look. This is all a joke. I lost a bet. Ann! Come back."

But his words were practically smothered in the roar of the cab as it shot away from the curb and into the traffic.

Bertie was left quite alone. Not quite, because the two gray-overcoated officers were still with him. But in spirit he was bleakly and desolately alone.

"Madame Guillotine," he said blackly, "I embrace you."

"He's nuts," one copper said.

The other nodded.

THE American jailing system, in Bertie's opinion, had not been noticeably improved since last he had favored the institution with his presence.

The cell was small, the doors and windows barred. This last was the worst feature. It gave everything such a definite look.

He had been pacing the floor for five hours and now he gave up and slumped down on the cell's narrow cot. With a touch of Yogi fatalism he had stopped worrying about Ann and his brother. For all practical purposes they were out of his life forever from henceforth onward. In later years when time had mellowed them, they might begin speaking to him again, but as for the present, he was a dead duck.

It was late afternoon, he decided by glancing up at the window. The Homeric struggle between Mosswood and State was probably in its final period by now. Soon it would be history.

He began pacing again. Of course losing the esteem and affection of his girl and his brother was a disastrous blow, but missing the annual game with State was no light matter in itself.

The fact that almost a thousand dollars of his money was on Mosswood only increased his feeling of frustration.

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Overcome by anxiety he grabbed the bars and jerked at them foolishly.

"I want to get out of here," he shouted. "Let me out, do you hear?"

There was a rustle behind him.

"I hear you, Master!" a soft, toneless voice whispered.

"What's that?" Bertie said, startled. He peered through the bars into the empty corridor. "Who said that?"

"I, Xanthos, have heard you and am here to do your bidding, Master."

This time Bertie turned around and saw a vague crouching shape in one dark corner of the cell. At the same time he remembered his experience with the demons the night before. Another thing dawned on him. He suddenly realized from where the football tickets had come. Xanthos, or one of his ghoul apprentices, had obviously been responsible for that. He was surprised that he hadn't thought of this before.

"Well, Xanthos," he said sternly. "It seems that everything you do gets me into trouble. I can't say as I like it either."

"I am sorry," the cold lifeless voice said, "but I cannot help that. I must obey your commands."

"Supposing I give you a command right now," Bertie asked cautiously. "What then?"

"I would obey."

"Supposing I would tell you to get me out of this blasted jail?"

"It would be accomplished."

"Then," Bertie said contentedly, "your days of unemployment are over. Get to work."

"As you wish, Master."

THE dark shape in the corner flitted out of the range of his vision and the next instant he felt a pair of sharp claws resting on his shoulder.

"Do not be alarmed," Xanthos' voice was almost in his ear. "I am on your shoulder. We will leave together."

Bertie started to turn his head but Xanthos' voice, suddenly as chilling as ice, stopped him.

"Do not look as you value your sanity!"

"Why?" Bertie asked stubbornly.

"Do not look," Xanthos repeated. "You would not—like what you would see. I am not—pleasing to the eye."

"Sorry, old chap," Bertie said, touched. "I know just how you feel. I was self-conscious when I had pimples on my face. All in the mind, though, all in the mind. Just forget about how you look and people won't notice you."

"Let us leave," Xanthos said.

"Sure thing," Bertie said eagerly. "Just how do we go about it? Ride away on a broom?"

"Certainly not," Xanthos answered. "My method is less involved."

Bertie heard a sharp metallic click, then the barred door of the cell swung open.

"Well, well," he exclaimed delightedly. "That is simple."

He stepped jauntily from the cell. With the confidence that Xanthos could handle any situation that might arise, he strode cheerfully down the corridor. The heavy steel door that separated the cell block from the jailer's office looked impregnable. But before he reached it, it swung ponderously open.

The warden was dozing comfortably before a pot-bellied stove when he heard the hinges of the massive door creak warningly. He opened his eyes and struggled to his feet just as Bertie sauntered nonchalantly into his office.

His hand speared for the gun at his hip.

Bertie felt an uncomfortable sensation at the pit of his stomach.

"Now don't do anything rash," he

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said nervously.

His admonition was unnecessary. For the warden's bulging, incredulous gaze was riveted in horror at a point about five inches above Bertie's left shoulder.

His lips twisted and the gun slid from his limp fingers. Then with a soft moan he pitched forward to the floor.

"That is fortunate," Xanthos said drily. "When he comes to he will think this was just a nightmare. Had he remained conscious any longer he would spend the rest of his life in a strait jacket."

"You can't be that bad," Bertie scoffed. "You've got a touch of an inferiority complex, that's all. You ought to read Dale Carnegie. He'd straighten you out."

"Nevertheless," Xanthos said, "I shall make myself invisible for the rest of our trip. You may look now with safety."

Bertie turned his head and saw nothing. But he could still feel the grip of the claws on his shoulder.

"What is your wish now?" Xanthos inquired.

"I'll let you know when we get to the game," Bertie said, glancing through the window at the setting sun. "That is if we get there on time."

WHEN they arrived at the jam-packed stadium the minutes of the fourth quarter were ticking away and Mosswood College was trailing by six points.

Bertie squirmed his way through the crowd to the middle of the field. One anguished glance told him that State was threatening to score again.

They had the ball on the Mosswood's thirty yard line. And on their first play from scrimmage a fleet-footed State back broke loose and streaked for the Mosswood goal.

"Xanthos!" Bertie cried. "Do something!"

"This seems beyond my ken," Xanthos answered. There was a bewildered note in the demon's voice. "Everything is so confused and upset. What is it you want me to do?"

"Stop that man!" Bertie shrieked. "That man that the others are chasing. "Don't let him get away."

"As you wish," Xanthos muttered.

Bertie felt the claws on his shoulders tighten. But his eyes were riveted on the sprinting State back. He was racing down the field, yards ahead of the nearest Mosswood player. . . . Past the fifteen . . . the ten . . . the five

"X a n t h o s !" Bertie screamed. "You're a washout. You're fired. You—"

The words froze on his lips. For an incredible, unimaginable thing had happened on the field. Along the end of the gridiron, just before the goal line, a huge yawning pit had miraculously opened.

From this black pit flames shot forth, forking their way through the belching waves of sulphur laden smoke which poured out with them.

The touchdown-bound State back wheeled from this trench of hideous fire and brimstone and, with a wild bellow of fright, raced in the opposite direction.

A solid roar of incredulous sound burst from the throats of the spectators. On the field the two teams milled about in hopeless confusion and bewilderment. All, that is, except the State back who was still legging it in the opposite direction, the ball held tightly under one arm.

In the wild, screaming crowd there was only one person who had any idea of what had happened. And that was Bertie Crimmins. He knew that Xanthos had been the agency behind this

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miraculous demonstration. The knowledge brought him a warm glow of contentment. How could he lose with such forces backing him?

Listening to the excited comments about him he realized that no one had an accurate idea of what had happened. There was a different and conflicting story on every pair of lips.

Then a new roar broke from the crowd.

The frantically fleeing State back was racing for the Mosswood College goal line! Those of his teammates who had recovered their senses started after him, shouting desperately.

But the roar of the crowd drowned out their voices and amid a deafening volume of noise the State back galloped over the wrong goal line giving Mosswood six points and tying up the game.

BERTIE relaxed, sighing happily. The game was tied up now and with a bit of assistance from Xanthos it would soon be in the bag. At least from the wreckage of his life he could salvage his bets and start anew.

"Well done, Xanthos," he said complacently. "Now just arrange things for a Mosswood touchdown and everything will be jake."

There was no answer.

"Xanthos!" he said sharply. "Do you hear me?"

Silence.

A bead of perspiration stood out on Bertie's forehead. There was a cold empty feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"Xanthos!" he said pleadingly. "Don't get in a sulk now. I really need you."

There was no answer. And when the game ended a few moments later, a tie twelve to twelve, there was still no evidence of Xanthos.

Bertie's head sagged forward against his chest. The crowd surged past his lonely figure but he hardly noticed. Time passed. It was almost dark before Bertie stood up and left the stadium.

He realized with bitter clarity that his thoughtless dismissal of Xanthos had been final and definite. He had fired Xanthos. And Xanthos evidently meant to stay fired.

There was only one bright spot in the otherwise gray scheme of things. He hadn't lost all of his money. In the case of a tie all bets were off, but this was somehow negative compensation in the face of all he had lost.

He hailed a cab dispiritedly and gave his brother's address. With a moody sigh he decided to leave town and lose himself to society. Years later he might emerge from the Australian bush, calm and kindly, forgetting the slings and arrows that had driven him there. Now they pressed on his soul like a drab pall. Life was very sad.

IN this same cheerless state of mind he entered his brother's home. The light was on in the library and he could hear the low murmur of voices from the room. His hopes of slipping by unnoticed were blasted sky high as his brother suddenly appeared in the doorway, his face flaming with excitement.

"Bertie!" he shouted in a most unscholarly voice. "Come in here."

With a fatalistic sigh Bertie entered the library. What devil's brew was being hatched for him now he had no idea. Nor did he care. Nothing could ever bother him again.

Professor Overton, president of Mosswood, was standing beside his brother's desk.

"It is absolutely incredible," Bertie heard him murmur.

"What is, sir?" Bertie asked blankly.

"Bertie," his brother said imploringly, "for once in your life think care-

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fully. Did you write this?"

He thrust an envelope before Bertie, on which was scrawled—in Bertie's handwriting—the words he had copied from the parchment.

"Why, I guess I did," Bertie said.

"You guess?" his brother shouted. "Don't you know?"

"Why yes," Bertie said, a little startled by his brother's vehemence, "I did write it. I copied it from the parchment that I found in the drawer of your desk."

"This parchment?" his brother asked, extending the ancient papyrus toward him.

Bertie looked at it closely. Yes, it was the same one. Same paper, same ink—No! It wasn't written in English as the other had been. It couldn't be the same paper. The heiroglyphic scrawls on this parchment looked like the tracks of an inebriated chicken.

"Bertie," his brother said weakly, "This writing on the back of the envelope which you claim to have written is a perfect translation of this parchment document which the entire university has been working on for two years. How did you do it?"

Bertie blinked as his brother's words seeped into his brain. It didn't really make sense even then. As far as he could gather he was being accused of having done something rather clever. This was so surprising that it rendered him speechless.

He was sure he hadn't translated the abstruse and unintelligible document. The parchment from which he had copied had been as easy to read as English.. He was opening his mouth to deny any connection with the translation when a staggering thought struck him.

Maybe he had actually translated it. At the time he had been under the influence of the Mystic Clarification formula and maybe the hieroglyphic symbols had only *seemed* to be English. That, undoubtedly, was it!

HE PAUSED and lighted a cigarette nonchalantly.

"How did I do it?" he repeated his brother's question casually. "Well I hardly see how I can explain it to you. The principle involved is rather intricate. Tell me: Have you ever heard of the reverse double wing system?"

His brother and Professor Overton shook their heads humbly.

Bertie smiled patronizingly.

"You see?" he said. "We just don't have any common basis for discussion."

"Bertie," his brother said in a strangled voice, "when did you take up the study of philology?"

"Always liked the stuff," Bertie said genially. "Sort of a hobby. Fine way to spend winter evenings."

The front door bell rang then, saving Bertie from more embarrassing and penetrating questions.

A second later and Ann walked into the room, looking more blonde and more lovely than he had ever seen her. She stopped abruptly when she saw him.

"I didn't come to see you," she said stiffly. "I only came to leave a message for you that I was leaving."

"Can't all this wait a moment," Professor Overton broke in testily. "Young man," he said to Bertie, "I would be honored if you would consider joining the faculty staff of Mosswood College. Men of your erudition and intelligence are all too few in this troubled world. Mosswood needs you."

Bertie's brother laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I've wronged you, Bertie. I can see that now. It makes me feel ashamed of myself. You can expect my blessing on anything you intend

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doing. Particularly if you are figuring on setting up a partnership."

Bertie turned toward Ann, and in three seconds flat she was in his arms.

"Darling," she murmured against his coat, "I don't understand any of it, but you seem like a new person. I'm sure that there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for your having been arrested and everything."

"There certainly is," Bertie said happily. "Fact is, they caught me with the goods. No! I mean it was all a case of mistaken identity."

He put his arms about the girl of his dreams and sighed happily. One minute he had been hopelessly crushed and the next thing he'd been transported to the clouds.

He was conscious that his brother was beaming fondly upon him and that even Professor Overton was bestowing admiring glances in his direction. Everything was excellent. Except—

"By the way," he said casually, "there's a leather bound book on your desk that kind of interested me. All about—demons and such. Anything to that stuff, you suppose?"

His brother laughed heartily.

"I know the book," he said. "It would take someone with the mind of a child to believe in the existence of such creatures. Demons. The very idea is ridiculous."

"So it is," Bertie said. "So it is."

He laughed at the absurdity of it all and then he kissed Ann very soundly. Later, however, he couldn't get the idea out of his head that as he was kissing her a toneless voice whispered,

"Very excellent effort, Master."

THE END

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"You *must* write more songs! You've got to!"

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The LEGEND of MARK SHAYNE

By JOHN YORK CABOT

These songs were really ghost-written—and Mark Shayne sold them as his own creation.

TO those who know anything about that stretch of Mid-Manhattan called Tin Pan Alley, and even to those who dance, sing, and listen to the tunes that pour forth weekly from that madhouse of American melody—the name and legend of Mark Shayne must certainly be familiar.

Shayne, composer of *Baby, Why Do I Care?, Heartbreak Melody, Just Ask Your Heart About Me,* and countless other hit songs far too numerous to mention, was as much a part of musical America as Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, or George Gershwin.

He was, in fact, looked upon along the Great White Way as not only a top-notch tunesmith, but a sensationally stellar success story. Broadway wise men could recount to you, even to the date and year, the thrilling episode in the first rung of the ladder in Shayne's career—the "break" that took him from the ranks of obscure publicity men and started him toward the proverbial Fame and Fortune he was later to attain as a Great Composer.

The "break" occurred a little over ten years ago, just about the time that the depression had settled over the nation to stay a little while. The financial gloom that had blanketed the United States was felt everywhere, and—as *Variety* can tell you—nowhere more than on Broadway.

Only the most venturesome producers were risking their bank rolls in the theater, and the majority of those who did wound up inevitably in the poor house. The darkened theatrical palaces along the Main Stem were like mausoleums in a cemetery, and the lightless signs outside them were as markers to grave plots.

Actors, agents, singers, dancers were starving to death with what became monotonous regularity. Theatrical productions, as rare as flowers that bloom in the fall, became coveted plums over which thrushes and thespians alike were only too eager to knife one another.

In Mark Shayne's racket—publicity—conditions were no better. And if it hadn't been for Shayne's very early training in the art of cutting a friend's throat, he might never have landed the job to publicize the small musical comedy, *Yipeee!,* which opened rehearsals bravely in the face of conditions.

The cast for *Yipeee!,* even to the chorines, were all working on a when-and-if basis. In theatrical parlance, when-and-if meant that they would get paid for their efforts only when, and if, the show made money. This was, of course, in blatant disregard of the wishes of Equity—that worthy organization designed to protect the rights of show people. But with times as they were, Equity occasionally closed its eyes in such matters and breathed a prayer for the good luck of its

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children.

Needless to say, the publicity services of Mark Shayne were secured on such a when-and-if agreement. This was all right with Shayne, however, for he was working while the rest of his colleagues were subsisting on canned dog food.

Van Evans Garth was the Producer of *Yipeee!* Undoubtedly you've read of Garth in the history of the theater. Called the Grand Old Man of the stage, he had been at the peak of his career in the middle Twenties. And during the year in which *Yipeee!* was staged, the Grand Old Man was definitely riding a sled to oblivion. You'll recall that he died three years after *Yipeee!*

Unfortunately, Van Evans Garth was thinking in terms of the gay Twenties when he produced *Yipeee!* The musical comedy was as dated as your morning coffee. The costumes were behind times, the story had been told too often to seem fresh, the songs and lyrics were equally, or perhaps especially, lousy.

The cast was faintly aware of all this as rehearsal weeks droned on. But their loyalty to the Grand Old Man, and the fact that they had nothing else, kept them plugging along. Even Mark Shayne stuck by the show, although he had never won prizes in school for loyalty.

But while Shayne stuck by, Shayne looked around and privately arranged to sue the Grand Old Man for back salary just in case. There is no doubt that Shayne would eventually have sued, except for what occurred four days before *Yipeee!* was to open.

IT was after a dismally frantic rehearsal that Shayne buttonholed the Grand Old Man. They were alone in the theater when Shayne spoke his mind.

"Listen, Van," Shayne said sharply to the tired old man, "this thing stinks. No matter what you do to it, or try to do with it, it smells up the stem. You'll close in a night."

Van Evans Garth winced at the brutality of the criticism. He shook his white head wearily from side to side.

"Don't say that, my boy. There are still three rehearsals. Other shows I have produced have seemed as tedious before the opening. It is just your nerves."

Shayne's sharp features twisted nastily.

"Nerves, hell," he spat. "It stinks no matter how you look at it."

"You are to publicize it, not criticize it," the old man reminded him wearily.

"What stinks more than anything else," Shayne went on, ignoring him, "is the music—plus the lyrics. And that's what I'm talking to you about. You're gonna throw out the music and the lyrics!"

"What?" the old man looked at Shayne as though he had lost his mind. "Three nights before the show opens you want me to throw out the lyrics?"

"And the music," Shayne reminded him. "You are going to use *my* music and *my* lyrics."

The Grand Old Man shook his head sadly.

"You are delirious, my boy. You are not a musician, and you know nothing of lyric writing. You have not been eating enough. You are delirious. Here," he fished into a worn wallet in which there reposed two five-dollar bills, "I have but ten dollars. Take five of it, my boy. Get a good meal today and tomorrow. Opening night I will have something for all of you."

Shayne took the bill.

"Thanks," he said. "But you are

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going to use my songs and my lyrics in this show—no matter what it does to the last three rehearsals. And if you don't," he paused significantly, "I think I can give the newspapers something in the way of a story about an ex Big Time Producer who has a wife in the nut house."

The color drained from Van Evans Garth's face. He stared in wordless horror at his publicity man. His hands began to tremble visibly. The muscles in his mouth twitched.

Shayne brought forth a portfolio.

"I have the new music and lyrics here," he said. "Suppose you start going over them now?"

The Grand Old Man's hands were still shaking badly as he reached for the portfolio. . . .

THUS, the Broadway wise men will tell you, Mark Shayne got his first "break." But of course there are certain elements, such as the threatened shame the publicity man held over Van Evans Garth's head, that never came to light. The Broadway wise men knew nothing of this, and their Shayne Legend recounts only that the brilliant young composer, seeing the weakness of the music and lyrics in *Yipeee!*, persuaded the Grand Old Man to substitute the Shayne epics at the last minute. And the sages of the Main Stem are also sadly lacking in another bit of information concerning this first episode in the Shayne Legend. They didn't know—as the Grand Old Man had known—that Mark Shayne was definitely not a musician, and that he knew nothing of lyric writing.

They do not know that on the same night Shayne "persuaded" Van Evans Garth to use new music and lyrics in *Yipeee!*, he made a later visit to another white haired old man. This second old man was an Austrian professor of music, starving in a New York tenement flat. His name was Johann Gelder, and he was pathetically, breathlessly, on edge when Mark Shayne burst into his dirty little room. . . .

JOHANN GELDER had been working on some musical arrangements when Shayne's knock sounded on the door. Heart hammering in excitement, the old man rose and crossed the room. Shayne was standing there grinning when he opened up.

"You have seen him?" Johann Gelder asked excitedly.

Shayne entered, threw his hat on the clean, ragged, little bed, and nodded.

"Yeah," I talked to him. "I convinced him that he ought to use the new tunes and lyrics. They'll be in the show when it opens."

There were stars in Johann Gelder's eyes. There was overwhelming gratitude in his heart. This was his chance—at long last!

"But there's one condition, of course," Mark Shayne declared. "Since no one in this country knows anything about you, and especially since your name means nothing on Broadway, those tunes and lyrics will have to be presented under my name."

Johann Gelder looked at Mark Shayne uncomprehendingly.

"But why am I not to be given credit for my songs, my lyrics?"

Shayne gave the older man a look of intense exasperation.

"It's like I told you," he blazed. "Names mean a lot. Yours is unknown. To put the first few tunes of yours over, it'll be smarter to use a name that's known a little around the Main Stem—my name!"

Johann Gelder shook his head sadly.

"But it is so strange."

Shayne turned toward the door.

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"All right. I'll tell Van Evans Garth that you don't want the tunes in his show."

"No! No!" Johann Gelder cried. "I do not mean that, Mr. Shayne. Do as you see best, of course!"

Shayne turned back, grinning.

"Now you're using your head," he said. "There's a little agreement here I had drawn up, just a gentleman's contract, really. I'll want you to sign it. It'll be sort of a partnership affair. You'll write the tunes, I'll handle them for you."

Johann Gelder nodded docilely, as he was to nod in much the same manner during the decade that followed.

BACK numbers of *Variety* will tell you that the musical comedy, *Yipeee!* didn't fold after its first night opening. Actually, it lasted five performances. The cast and Van Evans Garth were left penniless for their efforts after expenses had been met. But four of the songs from the show were picked up by bright-eyed music publishers and contracted for with their "composer" Mark Shayne.

Of these tunes, all made money, and two fell into the category of "smash hits." Mark Shayne's name as a composer was born over night. And Johann Gelder was especially pleased with the hundred-dollar check Shayne bestowed on him. It kept the old Austrian composer for six weeks, during which time he turned out another song.

Shayne moved from his cheap lodging house into a terraced apartment on Park Avenue. Those were the days when terraced apartments were being given away with newspaper subscriptions, of course. But even at that, Shayne wasn't living beyond himself. After all, the songs were bringing in close to a thousand dollars a month.

For the remainder of the year, Mark Shayne contented himself with two more hit songs. One of them, *Baby, Why Do I Care?*, is still sung today. You began to see Shayne's name in all the Broadway columns, and his home town, a tiny hamlet in Iowa, proudly advertised on a billboard beside the state highway that ran through the village that it was the birthplace of the celebrated Mark Shayne.

In January, Mark Shayne took Johann Gelder out of his dingy tenement house and placed him in a tiny country cottage. The old man was pleased to the point of tears of gratitude. He had fresh air, and rolling hills, four rooms, and a piano. It cost Shayne fifty dollars a month—seventy-five for food and incidentals. But after all, he was wise enough to know the value of keeping his investment out of sight and healthy.

Two years passed, bringing with them three more hit songs from Shayne. He had turned down three Hollywood offers to do the scores for musical comedy films. It was at the end of the third year that Van Evans Garth died. The record on the coroner's ledger stated that the Grand Old Man had passed away from malnutrition. Mark Shayne was one of his pall-bearers.

And the stone heart of Broadway was touched to see the young composer choking back his tears as he assisted the man who gave him his first break to his final resting place. The Shayne Legend has it that the successful young composer's greatest grief was that he had known nothing of Garth's plight, and could easily have saved him if it hadn't been for the Grand Old Man's fierce pride.

Another piece of the Shayne Legend recounts how, just before Garth's casket was closed, Mark Shayne quietly placed a gold-mounted five-dollar bill

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in the old producer's clasped hands—symbolizing the aid which the Grand Old Man once extended to Mark Shayne. It was all very touching, and was the subject of conversation for weeks along the Main Stem.

But the tide moved on, and Van Evans Garth soon became forgotten, while Mark Shayne went on to greater and greater successes. His musical comedy, *This Is the Life,* became the most talked of show since the turn of the New Deal.

JOHANN GELDER, happy with his fresh air and rolling hills and hundred dollars every month—Shayne had upped the ante twenty-five dollars after the musical comedy hit—continued to turn out some of the catchiest songs of the nation.

People mentioned Mark Shayne in the same breath with Victor Herbert and Johann Strauss. And the young composer modestly admitted to being one of the greatest musical figures of the century. In 1937, Mark Shayne paid income tax on five-hundred-thousand dollars. And in the following year that figure was doubled.

Then, for the first six months of the next year, Johann Gelder didn't write a single piece of music. Shayne, who had contracts calling for three songs a year, was positively furious with the old man. He made a special trip to see him. . . .

Johann Gelder had aged considerably and showed it. Even the fresh air and sunshine hadn't been able to stay the ravages of what ailed him. His wrinkled features were torn with anxiety, grief, and torment as he faced Mark Shayne.

"It is not that I do not try, Mr. Shayne," the old man said pleadingly. "It is not that I am ungrateful for all you have done for me. But music I no longer feel. Gay tunes no longer come from my heart. My people, in Austria, surely you read of the misery that has engulfed them!"

Shayne's sharp features were wrathful.

"To hell with that noise!" he snapped. "We have a contract that your damned slop sentiment can't break. How'd you like to go back to the gutters where I found you, eh?"

Johann Gelder sat down beside his beloved piano, head in hands.

"I cannot," he sobbed. "I cannot."

Ice was beginning to form in Mark Shayne's veins. He felt a terror which he was wise enough not to reveal before the old man. Changing his attitude a little, he put his hand on Gelder's shoulder.

"Turn out a tune around that, then," he said desperately. "Put all you feel into music."

Johann Gelder looked up slowly. Behind the pain in his old eyes there was a glowing fire.

"You are right," he said softly. "I know you are right. I shall try!"

Mark Shayne drove back to New York two days later with another song, and grave misgivings. He went immediately to the office of his publishers.

"Look," Mark Shayne told John Colder, head of the publishing organization, "it's like this, John."

And then Shayne went on to say, with much dramatization, almost exactly what Johann Gelder had said.

"There's no more real happiness in the world today, John," Shayne said, while the sweat rolled down the neckband of his twenty-five dollar shirt. "There's no real laughter. People are being killed, oppressed. Nations are being overrun. I can't find it in me to write the light, happy stuff anymore, John."

It may be said much to John Colder's

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favor, that the round little music publisher had no particular liking for Mark Shayne. Now he eyed him rather coldly.

"But you've got a contract, Mark," he reminded him. "We have money, plenty of it, tied up in the advance plugging of your next tune. We have to have it. No matter how you feel."

"Have your boy play this," Mark Shayne said, extending the music manuscript and holding his breath. "It was all I could find to write."

An employee played the song, and Colder listened. He asked that it be played again. He looked over the lyrics, then he looked up at Mark Shayne dubiously.

"You've never written a tune like this before," he said.

Mark Shayne felt cold all over.

"You mean it's not—" he began.

"I mean it's magnificent," Colder said quietly.

IT was magnificent. It was a sensation. Undoubtedly you heard it. It was called, *Now They Are Left Behind.* It was Johann Gelder's peak, his masterpiece.

It was Johann Gelder's last song. He died, from grief and old age, two weeks after its publication. And Mark Shayne, riding on the crest of the masterpiece he hadn't composed, came close to going insane.

Shayne had made millions from Gelder's songs, but he had thrown most of it around like rice. Even *Now They Are Left Behind,* although it was minting money, wouldn't take care of Shayne's style of living for long. There had to be more tunes, other songs. And where was he going to get them?

Johann Gelder had taken Mark Shayne's talent with him to the grave.

He had money, fame, he could hire another ghost writer perhaps. Shayne thought desperately about this angle. There should surely be another starving composer around New York who would be only too glad to ghost songs for Shayne. But he knew of none. And the successful composers, naturally, couldn't be touched. Shayne couldn't even risk hiring a starving composer, for if that ghost's songs were bad—and Shayne had little ability to tell a good song from a poor one—it meant a staggering loss in prestige.

Shayne began to drink more heavily than before. Perhaps he drank in an effort to find a way out of his dilemma. Or perhaps he drank to shut out the songs of Johann Gelder which came to him wherever he went.

He tried to compose himself. He had learned to play the piano during his decade of fame. But his efforts were miserably futile. And another four-month period was running out. A four-month period which would mean another song.

John Colder gave him two additional months to get a song to him. Two months beyond contract stipulations. And then he was forced to break the contract. The word was around the Main Stem that Shayne was slipping, drinking himself into oblivion.

And then there was the night that Shayne got roaringly drunk in a small dive in Greenwich Village. Somehow he ended up in a tiny, unknown cafe. There was a woman there. Not the type of blonde beauty that Shayne was used to having around him. This woman was old, thin, gray, and haggard. Shayne found himself buying her drinks and babbling drunkenly about his troubles. Shayne, of course, was hardly conscious that he was revealing as much as he was until the old crone's voice came reedily to him.

"Then it is this man who has died you'd like to see?" she asked.

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Shayne laughed in dismal drunken morbidity.

"Thash right. I'd like to see my ghost. But I can't, 'cause he'sh a ghost—get it?"

"Perhaps he can be called," said the old crone.

SHAYNE blinked at her blearily.

"Thash a hot one. Sure, leave a call for 'em. Tell 'em the guy that picked him up outta the gutter wansh full payment on hish contract."

The juke box started up as someone put a nickel in it. *Now They Are Left Behind,* was the record. Foggily, the now too familiar strains came to Shayne like an eerie answer to his drunken request. He wheeled on his bar stool.

"Turn that damned thing off!" he screamed.

Someone laughed. Shayne grabbed the bottle at his elbow, rose from the stool and staggered over to the machine. With one vicious gesture he hurled the bottle through the glass panel of the juke box, smashing the contents inside. The record, of course, ceased. The silence was chilling.

"That'll cost you plenty," the bartender's voice came to Shayne. "Or I'll call the cops."

Shayne threw a fifty dollar bill across the bar. The old crone was at his side, plucking at his sleeve.

"You would like to see your friend again?" she whined.

Shayne broke into a fit of laughter.

"Shure, shure thing. Lead me to him!"

The old crone took his arm, and the cold night air hit Shayne's cheeks as they went out the door. The rest was a blur until he was climbing worn and creaking stairs in a darkened, musty hallway. Then they were in a small, incense-stinking, poorly-lighted room. He could see the crone removing her coat, going to a table, pulling up chairs.

"Sit here," said the crone, indicating one of the chairs before the table.

Giggling drunkenly, Shayne staggered over to the table and sat down. The crone sat opposite, looking at him.

"What is it worth to see your friend?" she whined.

Shayne pulled out his wallet and threw his remaining bills on the table. The crone picked them up eagerly, eyes lighting. She stuffed them between her dirty blouse and wrinkled throat.

"Before we start," she said. "What is his name?"

"Johann Gelder," Shayne muttered sleepily. He weaved slightly on his chair. The stifling air of the place was making him foggier.

"Now we must have silence," the old crone whispered.

"No glassh ball?" Shayne muttered.

"Concentrate on silence and your friend," the crone whispered.

The silence held for perhaps two minutes. Then the crone's voice, as if from a great distance, whined,

"Johann, Johann Gelder. From your tomb, Johann—arise!"

Shayne, drunk as he was, felt a chill caress his spine.

"Johann, Johann Gelder," the crone's voice came faintly, eerily. "Rise from the nameless mists and come to us."

The silence stretched for an eternity, now, and the very unnamed terror Shayne felt was penetrating his drunken fog. There was the faintest murmur of a whine in the darkened room, and a voice floated weirdly through the blackness.

"Shayne. Mark Shayne," whispered the voice. "I hear the calls."

MARK SHAYNE was suddenly ghastly white. He tried to stand,

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but his knees would not support his weight. He sank back.

"I am Garth, Shayne," the voice came to him. "I am Van Evans Garth."

"Thash's not Gelder!" Shayne choked. "Send him away!"

The voice grew fainter, and the crone's thin arm stretched across the table and her hand closed over Shayne's tightly.

"Silence," she hissed.

There was still a fainter murmuring whine in the blackness of the room. This was growing louder.

"Shayne?" a faint whisper sounded. "Shayne? This is Johann Gelder, come to you. What is it you want of me?"

There was no mistaking the eerie half-whisper that floated through the darkened, stinking little room. It was the voice of Johann Gelder.

"Songs," Shayne choked. White beads of sweat stood out on his brow. His throat seemed horribly constricted. It was all he could do to speak. "I want songs, Gelder."

The crone withdrew her withered paw from Shayne's wrist. The murmuring whine grew louder. Johann Gelder's voice came more strongly.

"Take . . . this token . . . from one in the Shades who knew you."

Something was pressed into Shayne's moist palm. He looked across the table, but the crone had her arms folded and her eyes closed.

"Take this token . . . and hear the songs . . . Shayne . . . I leave." The voice of Johann Gelder evaporated into silence. Shayne felt like screaming after him, but he could only close his fist tightly against the object in it. More seconds of silence. Then the crone's voice came sharply.

"That is all. It is finished. They have left," she said shrilly.

Shayne rose, dropping the object into his pocket. He looked wonderingly around the room, almost uncomprehendingly. He swept his hand across his damp forehead. Then he shuddered and cursed. He staggered toward the door lurchingly through an alcoholic haze, never looking back at the crone. Somehow he got down that musty hallway. A cab driver brought him back to his terraced apartment hours later—sickeningly drunk. The elevator boy carried him into his place and put him to bed.

WHEN Shayne awoke, he could hear someone playing the piano in the drawing room outside his door. Vaguely, he remembered the events of the previous evening. Shakily he got out of bed, slipped into a robe, and staggered into the drawing room to see who the person was he had brought home with him.

The piano—a luxurious concert grand—faced his bedroom, and Shayne had to move around to the side of it to see who was playing so concertedly at this time of morning.

The keys were moving. The music filled the room. *But no one sat at that piano.*

It took Shayne fully a minute for him to comprehend that much. And in that minute the keys continued to move fluently, and the music continued to fill the room.

Then Shayne gasped, backing away, face whiter than before.

"What is this?" Shayne groaned.

The music continued. The keys rippled onward.

Shayne suddenly stepped to the piano, viciously jerking down the top that covered the keys. The music continued uninterruptedly. And then it came to Shayne, through the sickness and terror that he felt, that this was a composition unfamiliar to him. A song

(Continued on page 238)

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»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

Harold Lawlor

I SUPPOSE I ought to start out by suggesting, with becoming diffidence, that you'll probably find this pretty dull reading. But a pox on such false modesty! As a matter of fact, I expect my story will fascinate the daylights out of you.

I was born in Chicago in—well, maybe I'd better not tell the year. After all, why wash my dirty linen in public? But if you insist, it was 1910. My childhood followed the usual pattern. I rode around on kiddie cars, and drank orange juice, and was once kicked in the head by a horse, and stuff like that. It wasn't until I went to work that my past really started to get purple.

My first job, after I was graduated from high school, was in the traffic department of an importing firm. I did very well for a year, too—just fine, in fact—until I consigned a freight car full of stuff meant for Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, to Scottsdale, Arizona. When my boss started receiving telegrams from that sleepy little hamlet out there in Arizona, he was in a pet, let me tell you.

So I went to work for a loan company then.

The loan company people, being Irish, were smarter; so that job only lasted a month.

After that, I worked three years as a stenographer in the offices of a freight trucking concern. And I'd undoubtedly be there yet if they hadn't gone bankrupt—an unfortunate occurrence with which I had absolutely nothing to do. At least, don't think so. There were certain sly hints and veiled insinuations—but you know how people talk.

The next few years were depression years, and I certainly don't intend to re-live them—not even on paper. Besides being out of work, increasing deafness served to sharpen my sense of futility and general frustration.

It was during this period that I decided to try writing because it looked so easy. (Hollow laughter is indicated right about here.) Boy, do I ever know better now! I spent three years writing, but alas! not selling, love pulps. Also tried an occasional groaner (confession story, to you.) This dreary time of rejection slips was not without its humorous moments, though.

Most writers like to reminisce ruefully about their rejected stories that are returned by the fastest freight, but I bet I'm the only writer extant who had a story come back via airmail. Honestly, one did. I moped for days. Somehow it seemed to conjure up a picture of the editor handling my beloved story with tongs. Or even a ten-foot pole.

Editors! The stories I could tell about them! (But not Mr. Rap, of course. *Nice* Mr. Rap who bought the first story I ever sold, and whom I certainly do not intend to let out of my clutches.)

But to get back. Since art wasn't going to pay so well as I'd thought, when Don Wilcox offered me a job as his typist last fall I leaped at the chance. I typed all his manuscripts, and in practically no time at all, I even wrote one of my own. Which just goes to show what bad company will do, and I hope this will be a lesson to you all.

Working for Don has been highly instructive—and fun, too (once you get used to his wire jackets and his blacksnake whips if you make a little teeny mistake in the typing!) We sometimes talk over plots—with much loud chatter about enchantresses and men without souls and rocket ships blowing up and what not. It's got so that not another tenant in the building will pass our door without crossing himself first.

And I guess that's about all. Nope, I'm not married. And as to my love-life—well, they're only allowing me seven hundred words here.

So that's my life up to now—but life for me really began on that day when Mr. Rap said my story was okay. I hope you'll like it—and I hope there'll be lots more of them in the future.

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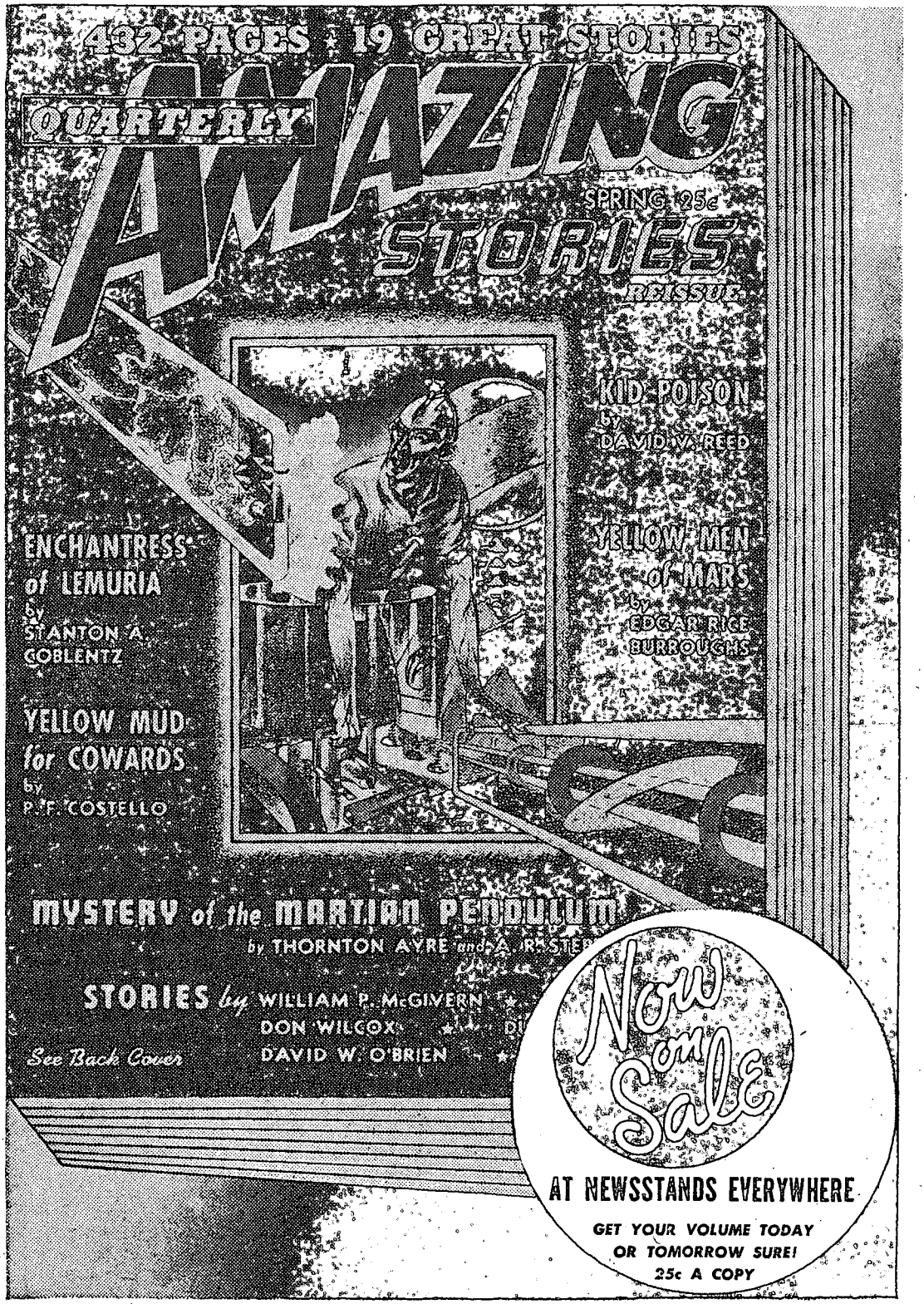

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READER'S PAGE

SOMETHING UNUSUAL?

Sirs:

Today I purchased the February FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—and something very unusual happened. I enjoyed the entire magazine. I was surprised; it was about the last thing on Earth I expected.

"Doorway To Hell" is unquestionably a great story. It is the best story I have ever read in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

EDWARD C. CONNOR,
929 Butler Street,
Peoria, Illinois.

We hope that from now on your reactions to our magazine are of the "unusual" variety.—Ed.

ALL OTHER STORIES SECOND

Sirs:

Your February issue was one of the best you have ever put out, and I don't mean maybe!! The outstanding story of the issue was "Doorway To Hell". All the other stories were tied for second place. The cover was the best you ever put out. Are your interior illustrations done twice the size as they appear in the magazine?

ANTHONY AHEARN,
3170 Valhalla Place,
The Bronx, N. Y.

Our illustrations are generally done half larger, although some are twice size. Finlay and Magarian do them same size.—Ed.

NOW HE KNOWS!

Sirs:

After reading the February issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, I know your statement of "The Best Fantasy Magazine On The Market" is true. "Doorway To Hell" was surely the best story that you've printed in your magazine yet. Dunc came out with a good story when he wrote "The Outsiders". What a cover! The other stories were so good it was too hard to rate them, but "The Lady and the Vampire" came out third.

THOMAS REGAN, JR.,
138 Townsend Street,
New Brunswick, N. J.

We are frankly surprised at the reaction to our latest serial. "Doorway To Hell" has hit hard, and we are extremely pleased. We'll certainly give you more of this type story!—Ed.

(Reader's Page is cut short this month, because of our surprise issue, and the ten great stories in the 244 pages, including covers, of this gala number. We are unused to calculating how many words go in so many pages. We'll do better next time!)

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The first step is to take a closer look. Writing for details in no way obligates you to install the plan. It simply indicates that you'd like to do *something* to help keep your people off relief when defense production sloughs off; *something* to enable *all* wage-earners to participate in financing national defense; *something* to retard inflation and store up tomorrow's buying power. So, write for the free kit of material being used by companies that have installed the Voluntary Defense Savings Pay-Roll Allotment Plan. Address: Treasury Department, Section A, 709 Twelfth Street NW., Washington, D. C.

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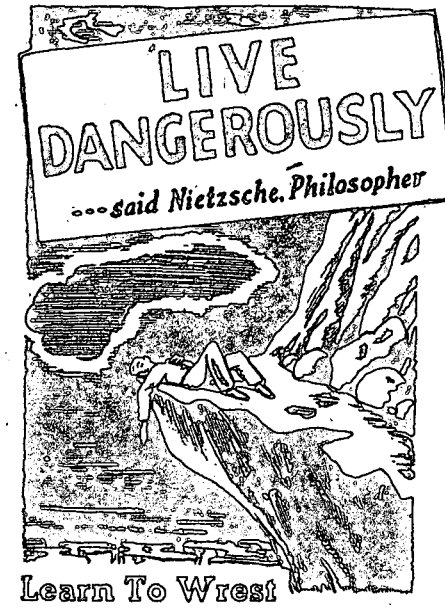

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THE LEGEND OF MARK SHAYNE

(Continued from page 232)

he'd never heard before. And it was played again and again, *in a style that was positively that of Johann Gelder!*

And then the gaps in Shayne's memory of the previous evening filled in completely. His features went from white to gray.

"Gelder!" Shayne croaked. "My God! You're ghosting again!"

The piano reached the end of the number, hesitated, and started it up again, repeating the same unfamiliar song.

And Shayne recalled Gelder's voice floating eerily through the gloom of that unholy room. Hear the songs, Gelder's voice had said. Hear *this* song, it meant!

Shayne's jaw was tight, his lips compressed, as he fought back the significance of this fantastic music pouring from his piano. He was sure now that Gelder was giving him another song. Why, or how, was a matter Shayne pushed from his mind.

Almost insanely he began to laugh. Then he seized up paper and pencil, strode to the piano bench, threw up the lid, and began to write swiftly on the sheets he placed before him.

Two hours later Shayne was still at it. A small stack of filled music paper lay at his elbow, and the piano tinkled on. He had three songs, and was transcribing the fourth. The lyrics came automatically, as if another hand were guiding his own.

AN HOUR after that, utterly exhausted, Shayne had finished. The piano, the moment he'd transcribed the last note and lyrics, had ceased also. Shayne took three stiff highballs to straighten himself up, and then he dressed hurriedly. He wasted no time shaving or bathing.

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In the taxi on his way to mid-Manhattan, Shayne smoked cigarettes intermittently, nervously, fighting back the almost hideous hammering of his heart. The cab took him to the offices of the Midtown Music Company. A secretary, looking curiously at his disheveled appearance, at the portfolio he carried under his arm, and seeming startled when he gave his name, ushered him promptly into the offices of the publisher, one Mike Morrison.

Morrison was more than surprised to see Mark Shayne. It had been months since Shayne had appeared in the publishing centers. Months since his contract with John Colder had been broken.

Shayne came immediately to the point.

"It's broken, Mike. That dry spell is through. I got four of the damndest tunes you ever heard, right here with me. They're yours to publish, Mike."

"What about John Colder?" Morrison asked suspiciously. "It would be a good chance to clean up that contract mess with him if you gave him the tunes."

Shayne snarled something unclean.

"That louse couldn't have the dirt from my shoes. They're yours, Mike."

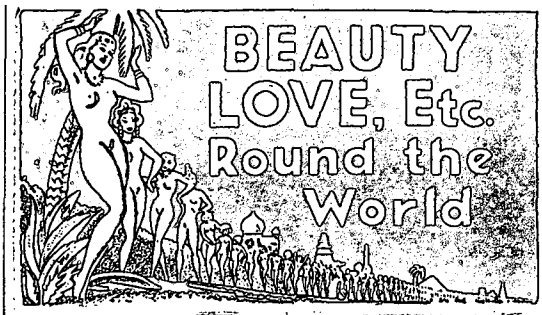
Morrison, eyes speculative, punched a button. A pianist came in a moment later. Morrison gave him the music manuscripts Shayne had put before him. The pianist went over to the scarred piano in the corner and ran through the first bars of the first song. Morrison lighted a cigarette and sat back.

Shayne paced back and forth nervously as the music began. When the first number had been played, the pianist looked up puzzledly at Morrison.

"Hell, Boss," he began.

Morrison waved his hand.

"Shut up and play the other three."



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There was a peculiar glint in his eye. Ten minutes later, when the pianist had finished the last note on the last number, Morrison turned to Shayne.

"This," he pronounced grimly, "is just what the music business has been waiting for."

"You mean?" Shayne choked hopefully.

"I mean you're through, Shayne. Washed up. We've enough dope on you from this to blackball you in the music industry for the rest of your life. Get out of here, you damned skunk, and don't poke your nose around again. Those tunes, all four of them, are due to be published by John Colder's outfit in two weeks. They were written by Colentze and Bardine. I don't know how in the hell you stole them, or who sold them to you, but you've bitten off sucker bait. Beat it!"

Dazedly, strickenly, Mark Shayne left the office. His eyes were slightly glazed, his mouth half agape, as he rode back to his terraced apartment. Alone, he entered his suite. The piano in the drawing room was playing. The tune was *Now They Are Left Behind.*

Shayne didn't approach the piano as it played. He knew no one would be sitting before it.

He went to his bedroom, found the discarded coat he had worn the night before. Fishing into the pocket he pulled forth a hard, square object. It was the gold-mounted five-dollar bill that he had placed in the cold hands of Van Evans Garth before his burial.

Like a man hypnotized, Shayne walked through his drawing room and opened the French doors that led out to his terrace. Down below him, some thirty floors, New York shimmered in the afternoon dusk.

Through the French doors that led to the drawing room, Shayne could hear the piano still playing *Now They Are Left Behind.* He climbed atop the parapet railing and stood teetering on the wind-swept perch. Then he swayed forward, and down.

In the apartment, the piano stopped playing . . .

No one ever mentioned the afternoon Shayne spent with Mike Morrison. Not even John Colder, who learned of it shortly after Shayne had left. And the gold-mounted five-dollar bill must have been lost in Shayne's downward plunge. For after his death it never became a part of the Mark Shayne Legend.

The End

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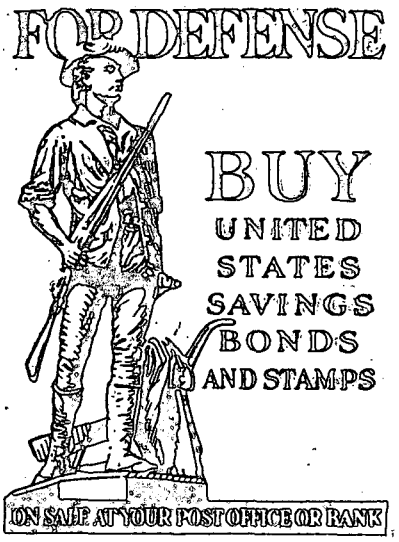
CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Will S. M. Ritter of New York, who wrote to Mrs. Dolores Lapi, 42-47th Street, Weekhawken, N. J., please send her a postal bearing his return address? She will be happy to answer his letter then . . . To highest bidder! Brand new copy of "Wenbaum Memorial" never opened, autographed by Raymond A. Palmer. Write Thomas Hoguet, 3671 Broadway, New York City . . . N. E. Goring, Fredericksburg,Va., has an Ulca Camera, in good condition that he will sell cheap . . . Charles E. Rigdon 1040½ Leishman Ave., New Kensington, Pa., age 27, 6 ft. 2 in. tall brown hair and eyes, desires to correspond with the male sex between the ages of 21-30—soldiers or sailors and readers of science fiction . . . Betty Mystrom 209 West 21st Street, Cheyene, Wyoming, would like to buy a copy of "The Mysterious Mr. Quinn" by Agatha Christie. She is 19 years old and would also like to correspond with people around her own age or older. Her hobbies are photography, horseback riding and reading . . . Any fan who believes he can write stories or SF articles for a fan magazine get in touch with Tom Ludowitz, 2310 Virginia, Everett, Wash. . . . Ruth Gay Fallis, 22 Howard Parkway, New Rochelle, N. Y., would like to hear from others who enjoy reading SF. She would like to correspond with anyone over 18 . . . Gilbert H. Jacobs, 936 East 15 Street, Brooklyn, N. Y., is desirous of contacting both male and female, age 18, living in the following locations: Alaska, South America, any British Dominion, Crown Colony, et al. His interests lie in the fields of science and other ideas as glass blowing . . . Shelley Frend, 2400 Leslie Street, Detroit, Mich., 20 years of age would like to correspond with girls from 17-22 . . . Richard Geney, 218 Fletcher Hall, Ann Arbor, Michigan is forced to dispose of a large collection of science-fiction and fantasy magazines at very reasonable prices. The collection includes AMAZING as far back as 1926, every issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, and many others. All are in good condition . . . Arthur Young, 1710 Montgomery Avenue, New York, N. Y., wants to correspond with young people, 18 and over (anyone under 80) and make personal friends with residents of New York City. He would like to organize a splendid social and cultural movement interested in the future. He is not interested in hearing from persons who are in any way connected with communist, nazi or fascist organizations. He'll answer all letters promptly . . . Hal Velardi, Sub Base Box 19, Coco Solo, Canal Zone, a sailor twenty-two years old, five-feet-seven, likes all sorts of sport, has brown hair and eyes, would like to hear from girls all over the world. Others are welcome to write also . . . S. David, 12 William Street, Maritzburg, Natal, South Africa, has for exchange cigarette, post and other view cards, and curios and novelties. Also genuine lucky charms. Will take in exchange magazines, books on Occultism preferably, and novelties. Please send yours . . . George Foust, 169 Little Albany St., New Brunswick, N. J., 21 years of age, would like female correspondents as pen pals about 18 or 19 years old. He is interested in pals from nearby cities . . . Don Eastman, 236 Lawton Terrace, Council Bluffs, Iowa, would like to trade the book "Tenar of Pellucidar" for "Gods of Mars" or "Back to the Stone Age" or "Pellucidar," all by Burroughs; would also like to buy science fiction books, please send list . . . Charles W. Wolfe, 214 Grand Ave., Las Vegas, New Mexico, would like to hear from anyone who has for sale a copy of Whitman Pub. Co. book No. 4056, "Tarzan and the Tarzan Twins With Jad-Bal-Ja, The Golden Lion," a Big-Big book copyright 1936 . . . S. M. Ritter, 1160 Simpson St., New York City, has 45 sci-fic mags to trade for others. Will also swap Vol. 1, No. 1s and Esquires for histories, biographies, etc.



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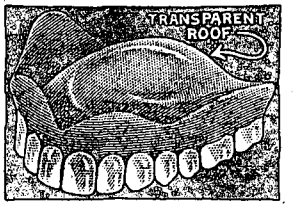

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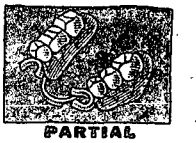

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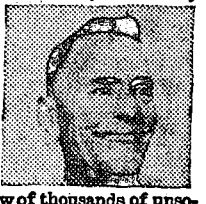

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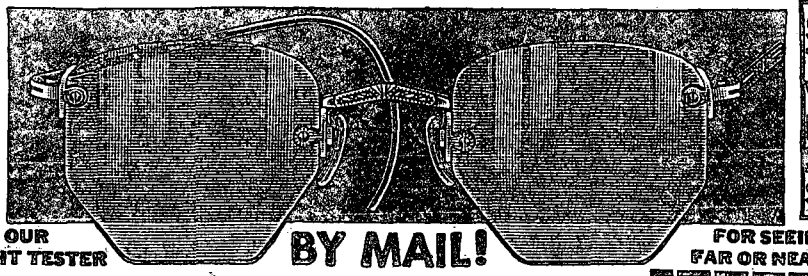

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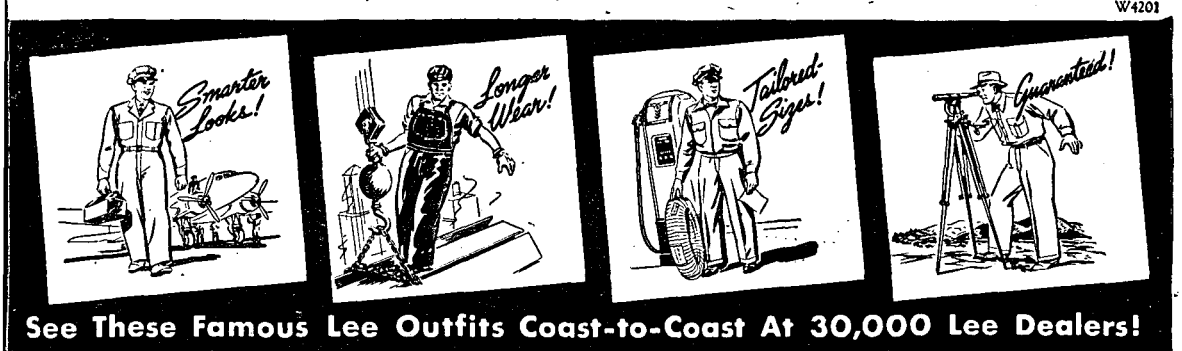

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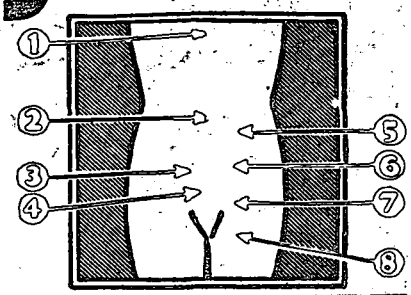

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